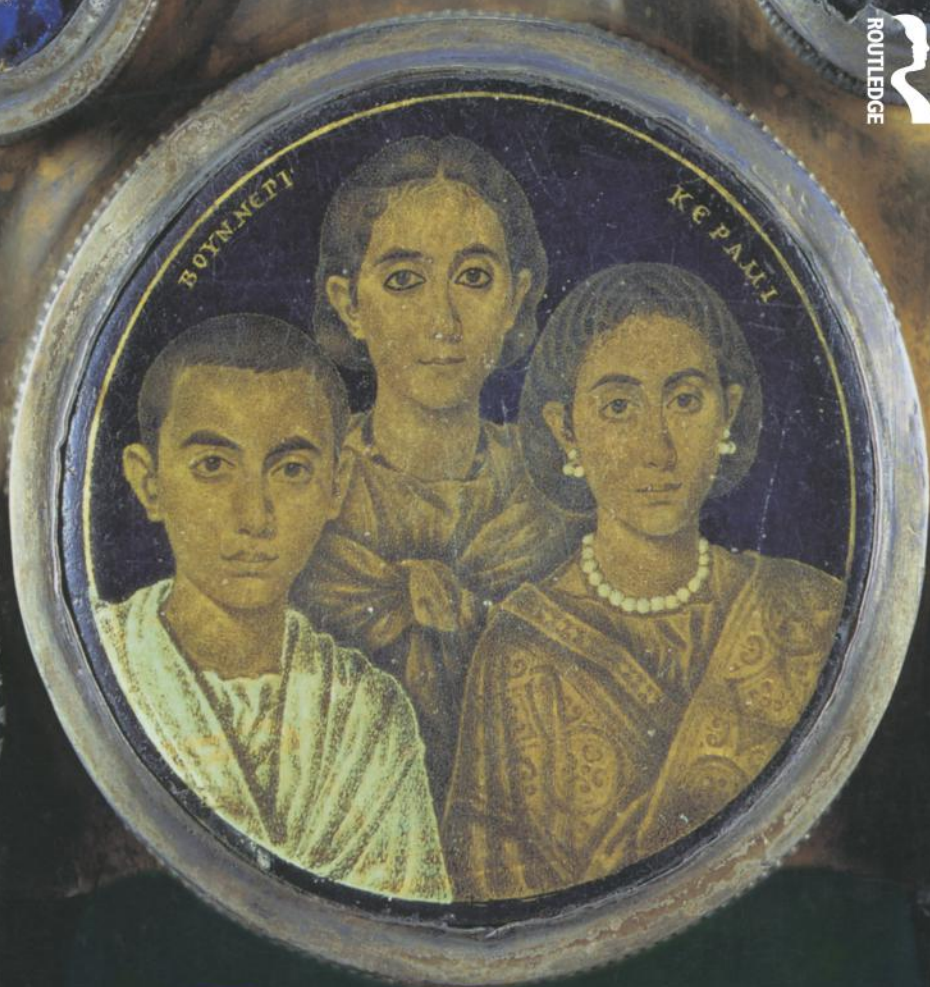


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VOLUME I-II

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Philip F. Esler is Vice-Principal and Provost, and Professor of Biblical Criticism at the University of St. Andrews. He is the author of *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, *The First Christians in their Social Worlds* and *Galatians*, and editor of *Modelling Early Christianity* and *Christianity for the Twenty-First Century*.

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Volume I-II

Edited by

Philip F. Esler



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CONTENTS



<i>List of illustrations</i>	ix
<i>List of contributors</i>	xv
<i>Preface</i>	xxiii
Philip F. Esler	
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xxv

Volume I

PART I: THE CONTEXT

1 The Mediterranean context of early Christianity	3
<i>Philip F. Esler</i>	
2 Armies, emperors and bureaucrats	26
<i>Jill Harries</i>	
3 Graeco-Roman philosophy and religion	53
<i>Luther H. Martin</i>	
4 Jewish tradition and culture	80
<i>James K. Aitken</i>	

PART II: CHRISTIAN ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

5 The Galilean world of Jesus	113
<i>Seán Freyne</i>	
6 Early Jewish Christianity	136
<i>David G. Horrell</i>	
7 Paul and the development of gentile Christianity	168
<i>Todd Klutz</i>	
8 The Jesus tradition: The gospel writers' strategies of persuasion	198
<i>Richard L. Rohrbaugh</i>	
9 Christianity in the second and third centuries	231
<i>Jeffrey S. Siker</i>	
10 From Constantine to Theodosius (and beyond)	258
<i>Bill Leadbetter</i>	

PART III: COMMUNITY FORMATION AND MAINTENANCE

11	Mission and expansion <i>Thomas M. Finn</i>	295
12	The development of office in the early church <i>Mark Edwards</i>	316
13	Christian regional diversity <i>David G. K. Taylor</i>	330
14	Monasticism <i>Columba Stewart, OSB</i>	344

PART IV: EVERYDAY CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

15	Social levels, morals and daily life <i>Bruce J. Malina</i>	369
16	Sex and sexual renunciation <i>Teresa M. Shaw</i>	401
17	Women, worship and mission: the church in the household <i>Gillian Cloke</i>	422
18	Communication and travel <i>Blake Leyerle</i>	452
19	Worship, practice and belief <i>Maxwell E. Johnson</i>	475

PART V: THE INTELLECTUAL HERITAGE

20	The Apostolic Fathers <i>Carolyn Osiek</i>	503
21	The Apologists <i>Eric Osborn</i>	525
22	The early theologians <i>Gerald Bray</i>	552
23	Later theologians of the Greek East <i>Andrew Louth</i>	580
24	Later theologians of the West <i>Ivor Davidson</i>	602
25	Creeds, councils and doctrinal development <i>Trevor Hart</i>	636
26	Biblical interpretation <i>Oskar Skarsaune</i>	660

Volume II

PART VI: THE ARTISTIC HERITAGE

27	Architecture: the first five centuries <i>L. Michael White</i>	693
28	Art <i>Robin M. Jensen</i>	747

29	Music	773
	<i>James W. McKinnon</i>	
30	Imaginative literature	791
	<i>Richard Bauckham</i>	

PART VII: EXTERNAL CHALLENGES

31	Martyrdom and political oppression	815
	<i>W. H. C. Frend</i>	
32	Graeco-Roman philosophical opposition	840
	<i>Michael Bland Simmons</i>	
33	Popular Graeco-Roman responses to Christianity	869
	<i>Craig de Vos</i>	

PART VIII: INTERNAL CHALLENGES

34	Internal renewal and dissent in the early Christian world	893
	<i>Sheila E. McGinn</i>	
35	Gnosticism	907
	<i>Alastair H. B. Logan</i>	
36	Montanism	929
	<i>Christine Trevett</i>	
37	Donatism	952
	<i>James Alexander</i>	
38	Arianism	975
	<i>David Rankin</i>	

PART IX: PROFILES

39	Origen	1005
	<i>Fred Norris</i>	
40	Tertullian	1027
	<i>David Wright</i>	
41	Perpetua and Felicitas	1048
	<i>Ross S. Kraemer and Shira L. Lander</i>	
42	Constantine	1069
	<i>Bill Leadbetter</i>	
43	Anthony of the Desert	1088
	<i>Columba Stewart, OSB</i>	
44	Athanasius	1102
	<i>David Brakke</i>	
45	John Chrysostom	1128
	<i>Pauline Allen and Wendy Mayer</i>	
46	Jerome	1151
	<i>Dennis Brown</i>	
47	Ambrose	1175
	<i>Ivor Davidson</i>	

— Contents —

48 Augustine	1205
<i>Carol Harrison</i>	
49 Ephrem the Syrian	1228
<i>Kathleen E. McVey</i>	
50 Julian the Apostate	1251
<i>Michael Bland Simmons</i>	
 <i>Index of biblical references</i>	 1273
<i>Index of classical references</i>	1287
<i>Index of Jewish references</i>	1297
<i>Index of patristic references</i>	1300
<i>Subject index</i>	1328

ILLUSTRATIONS



1.1	The Roman empire in 60 CE	4–5
1.2	Conjectural reconstruction of Hecataeus' map of the world	8
1.3	Reconstruction of Crates' Orb, c. 170–160 BCE	9
1.4	Simplified reconstruction of Eratosthenes' map of the <i>oikoumene</i>	10
1.5	Roman political economy: a systems model	15
1.6	<i>Res Gestae</i> of Augustus, in the Temple of Rome and Augustus, Ankara	20
2.1	Coin depicting the 71 CE triumph of Vespasian over the Jews	27
2.2	Roman army from Trajan's column in Rome	29
2.3	Bust of Hadrian from the Thames	29
2.4	Fresco of a soldier in the Via Latina Catacomb in Rome	34
2.5	Bust of Trajan from Ephesus	38
3.1	Map of Alexander's empire	54
3.2	Diagram of the Ptolemaic cosmos	57
3.3	Kistophoros Caryatid from the sanctuary of Demeter at Eleusis	69
3.4	Temple of Isis at Pompei	71
3.5	Fresco of a Mithraic Tauroctony from Marino	73
3.6	Mithraeum beneath the Baths of Caracalla in Rome	74
3.7	Mithraic 'ladder' of initiation from the Mithraeum of Felicissimus at Ostia	75
4.1	Relief on the Arch of Titus in Rome	81
4.2	The synagogue forecourt and public fountain in Sardis	95
4.3	The synagogue at Hammath-Tiberias	96
4.4	The seat of Moses in the synagogue at Dura-Europos	97
4.5	The zodiac mosaic of the synagogue at Hammath-Tiberias	98
4.6	Jewish symbols on a column from the synagogue at Corinth	99
5.1	Map of Galilee in the first century CE	114
5.2	Galilee: the physical features	115
5.3	A contemporary fisherman landing his catch at Tiberias	116
5.4	Roman aqueduct at Caesarea Maritima	119
5.5	The theatre at Sepphoris	123
5.6	The east wall of the Herodian Temple platform in Jerusalem	130
5.7	The hanging palace of Herod the Great at Masada	131

6.1	Painting of Peter from the catacomb of Marcellinus and Peter	140
6.2	Map of Palestine in Roman times	142
6.3	A sestertius minted in Rome in 72 CE in the Judaea Capta series	143
6.4	Recently published Oxyrhyncus fragments of the Gospel of Matthew	146
6.5	Possible fourth century CE Nazarene inscriptions from Farj	153
7.1	Major places and cities associated with the spread of the Christ-movement among gentiles in the first century CE	168
7.2	Fresco of Paul from the catacomb of Marcellinus and Peter	170
7.3	Nineteenth-century drawing of Syrian Antioch-on-the-Orontes	177
7.4	A nineteenth-century lithograph of the street called Straight	183
8.1	The Sea of Galilee	199
8.2	The social structure of Herodian Palestine	201
8.3	Palestine in Hellenistic and Roman times	202
8.4	Ancient grain mill found near Capernaum	203
8.5	Urban elite in the Gospel of Mark	204
8.6	Retainers in the Gospel of Mark	205
8.7	Urban poor in the Gospel of Mark	206
8.8	Outcasts mentioned in the Gospel of Mark	206
8.9	Peasants or villagers mentioned in the Gospel of Mark	208
8.10	Ancient stone olive press	210
8.11	Mosaic floor of loaves and fishes from the ancient church at Tabhga	214
8.12	A Roman milestone on the Via Maris	217
8.13	Synagogue at Capernaum	218
8.14	Jacob's well, at a shrine near Shechem	219
8.15	Jews/Judaeans	220
8.16	The Pool of Bethzatha	221
9.1	A Greek manuscript from the early third century CE showing Luke 16:9–21	238
9.2	Catacomb fresco of an <i>agape</i> meal <i>c.</i> late second century CE	241
9.3	Floor-plan of a house-church from Dura-Europos, <i>c.</i> 232 CE	242
9.4	Map showing the spread of Christianity by 300 CE	243
9.5	The emperor Severus Alexander on a coin from Rome, <i>c.</i> 229 CE	246
9.6	The Palatine graffito of the ass-headed Christ crucified, <i>c.</i> 200 CE	250
10.1	Statue of the Tetrarchs	261
10.2	Relief showing a sacrifice by Diocletian and Maximian	262
10.3	Head of Constantine from York Minster	263
10.4	The Curia, or Senate House, in Rome	268
10.5	Theodosius with his courtiers and soldiers, from an obelisk in Constantinople	286
11.1	The colosseum at Thysdrus (modern El Jem, Tunisia), south-east of Carthage	304
11.2	Mosaic of a charioteer from the circus at Carthage	305
14.1	A sixteenth-century illustration of early Egyptian monasticism	345
14.2	Monastic Syria, Cappadocia and Palestine	347
14.3	The late fifth-century basilica of Saint Symeon	349
14.4	Monastic Egypt	350

14.5	Monastery of Deir al Suryani in the desert of Scetis	352
14.6	Monastic Palestine	354
14.7	Wadi Chariton in Palestine	356
14.8	Latin monasticism	359
15.1	Institutional criteria for social ranking	372
15.2	The emperor Theodosius I, with courtiers and bodyguards, from an obelisk in Constantinople	380
15.3	Insulae block in the markets of the Trajan complex in Rome	395
15.4	Commercial premises in Ostia	396
15.5	Bakery and <i>molinium</i> at Pompeii	397
16.1	Mosaic dated c. 350 CE of women exercising	405
16.2	Second-century CE terracotta relief of a childbirth scene from Ostia	408
16.3	Fourth-century CE gold glass inset of a Christian family group	412
16.4	Fresco of Adam and Eve from the catacomb of St Peter and St Marcellinus	417
17.1	Fresco of Jesus and the Samaritan woman from the Catacomb of Callistus	425
17.2	Roman catacomb fresco of a bishop marrying a bride and groom	430
17.3	Roman catacomb fresco of a woman praying, early third century	437
18.1	Mosaic map with detail of Jerusalem from Madaba in Jordan, sixth century	455
18.2	Pilgrim graffito in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem	456
18.3	Map of major fourth-century pilgrim routes to the Holy Land	457
18.4	The Roman bridge at Cordoba	459
18.5	Section of a paved Roman road showing curbing, Jerash, Jordan	460
18.6	The Roman road (Hadrianic period) from Jerusalem to Jerash	461
18.7	A funerary relief showing a typical Roman merchant ship	466
19.1	Map of the Christian world in the fourth century CE	476
19.2	Classical liturgical rites of East and West	477
19.3	The house-church at Dura-Europos, Syria, c. 250 CE	481
19.4	Fresco of Eucharistic scene from the Catacomb of Saint Callistus	482
19.5	A woman in prayer from the catacomb of Saint Callistus, second half of the third century	486
19.6	The Holy Sepulchre complex in Jerusalem in the fourth and fifth centuries CE	490
19.7	Trajan's Forum and Old St Peter's, in the Vatican	491
19.8	Anaphoral structures in Eastern and Western liturgy	492
20.1	The emperor Domitian	506
20.2	Plan of the fourth-century <i>Titulus Clementis</i> church in Rome	507
20.3	Side panel of fourth-century sarcophagus	510
20.4	Restored façade of the second-century Temple of Hadrian at Ephesus	515
20.5	Second-century evil eye floor mosaic from Antioch	517
20.6	Peristyle of a first- to second-century house in Ephesus	518
20.7	The Via Egnatia beside the forum of Philippi	520
20.8	Roman agora at Smyrna (modern Izmir)	521
21.1	A nineteenth-century lithograph of Nablus, Justin's birthplace	527

21.2	An eighteenth-century view of the Roman forum	537
21.3	The Acropolis in Athens	539
21.4	A nineteenth-century lithograph of Antioch-on-the-Orontes	543
22.1	The statue of Hippolytus in the Vatican Library	556
24.1	Saint Jerome reading, painted by Alvise Vivarini c. 1475/80	617
24.2	Fifteenth-century painting of Saint Jerome in the wilderness	620
24.3	Augustine of Hippo	621
24.4	Painting of Augustine teaching rhetoric by Niccolò di Pietro (fl. 1394–1430)	622
26.1	Fragment of the Greek Twelve Prophets scroll from the Judean desert	669
26.2	The Junius Bassus sarcophagus (359 CE)	673
26.3	Decorations on Junius Bassus sarcophagus	674
27.1	City plan of regions III and IV along the Decumanus Maximus in Ostia	698
27.2	Plan of the Mithraeum of the Painted Walls, Ostia	700
27.3	Plan of San Clemente mithraeum in Rome	701
27.4	Synoptic plan of six Diaspora synagogues	703
27.5	An archaeological survey of the building history of Diaspora synagogues	704
27.6	Dura-Europos: synagogue, plan of the block	705
27.7	Earlier and later phases of the synagogue in Dura-Europos	706
27.8	Composite plan of the synagogue at Ostia	708
27.9	An archaeological survey of prebasilical church buildings	712
27.10	The Christian building in Dura-Europos, before and after renovation	713
27.11	Lullingstone: late Roman villa with Christian chapel, c. 390	716
27.12	Plan of San Crisogono in Rome	719
27.13	Siting plan and restoration drawing of early <i>aula ecclesiae</i> , San Crisogono, Rome	720
27.14	Isometric of San Clemente in Rome	721
27.15	Plan of SS Giovanni e Paolo, Rome	722
27.16	Isometric and plan of SS Giovanni e Paolo, Rome	723
27.17	Plan of the octagonal church at Philippi	724
27.18	Plan of the 'basilica' of Paul Philippi	725
27.19	Isometric of the Lateran Basilica c. 320, Rome	728
27.20	Plan of the Constantinian Basilica of St Peters, Rome	729
27.21	Plan of the synagogue and basilica complex in Stobi	732
27.22	Plan of the basilical synagogue at Sardis	734
27.23	Dar Qita, Syria: Church of St Paul and Moses c. 418	735
27.24	Plan of the Martyrium of St Philip at Hierapolis (Pamukkale)	736
27.25	Qal'at Siman, Syria: Martyrium of St Simeon	737
28.1	The Good Shepherd from the catacomb of Callistus	749
28.2	The baptistery from the Christian building at Dura-Europos	752
28.3	Funeral banquet from the catacomb of Callistus	754
28.4	Jonah cycle from the so-called 'Jonah sarcophagus' in the Vatican	757
28.5	Mid-fourth-century sarcophagus from the Vatican, with biblical scenes	758
28.6	Late fourth-century sarcophagus in Arles showing the <i>traditio legis</i>	759

28.7	The apse in St Pudenziana, Rome	761
28.8	Mid-fifth-century ivory diptych with miracles of Christ	763
28.9	Medallion from the mid fifth-century dome mosaic, Orthodox baptistery, Ravenna	766
28.10	Rebecca and Eliezer at the well, from the Vienna Genesis, early 6th century	768
29.1	Mass chants from the ninth-century manuscript St. Gall 359	774
29.2	Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1786, with closing portion of a Trinitarian hymn	775
29.3	Sarcophagus relief of a Roman general sacrificing a bull, with music	776
29.4	Musical instruments from the Jerusalem Temple on the Arch of Titus	783
30.1	Joachim retires to the sheepfold (after Giotto)	793
30.2	The presentation of Mary in the Temple (after Giotto)	794
30.3	The martyrdom of Peter (Filippino Lippi)	801
31.1	The amphitheatre at Lyons	825
31.2	The Colosseum in Rome	827
32.1	<i>The Crucifixion</i> , 1515–16, by Grünewald	842
32.2	Christ raises Lazarus, from a third-century sarcophagus	843
32.3	The beginning of John's Gospel from the Codex Sinaiticus	845
33.1	Early imperial coins referring to the divinity of Augustus	873
33.2	Remains of the Temple of Augustus and Roma at Pisidian Antioch	874
33.3	The theatre in Ephesus	875
33.4	Amphitheatre at Lyons	876
33.5	First-century street in Jerusalem	881
33.6	Part of the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem	882
34.1	Orthodoxy and heresy in early Christianity as constituted by insiders and outsiders	895
34.2	Christianities in the New Testament and related literature	897
34.3	Christianities in the first four Christian centuries	898
34.4	Mosaic of St Paul, Ravenna, 300–600 CE	900
35.1	The place of discovery of the Nag Hammadi library at the Djebel-el-Tarif	910
35.2	The end of the Apocryphon of John and the beginning of the Gospel of Thomas from the Nag Hammadi codices	911
35.3	The Nag Hammadi Codices, with their original leather covers	912
35.4	A map of dated evidence for the Gnostics and Valentinians to the eighth century	923
36.1	Praÿlios, <i>koinônos</i> inscription	933
36.2	Stephania tombstone from Galatia	934
36.3	Remains at Hierapolis (modern Pamukkale)	935
36.4	Asia Minor and the New Prophecy/Montanism	937
36.5	Flavius Avus graffito, from Khenchela (ancient Mascula)	940
36.6	The Perpetua window from Chester Cathedral	942
36.7	Late second-century statue of Apollo from Carthage	944
37.1	Twelfth-century Spanish manuscript of Beatus' <i>Commentary on Revelation</i>	968

37.2	Augustine at work, and his two cities, from a 1489 Basle edition of <i>De civitate Dei</i>	971
38.1	Late Roman mosaic representation of Alexandria from Jerash in Jordan	976
38.2	Sites and dates of councils and other major centres during the Arian controversy in the eastern empire	997
38.3	Sites and dates of councils and other major centres during the Arian controversy in the western empire	998
39.1	Lithograph of Origen	1006
40.1	Remains of Punic Carthage	1028
40.2	Early Christian symbols from Carthage	1029
40.3	An early Christian basilica in Carthage	1031
40.4	The Roman amphitheatre in Carthage	1037
40.5	The animal exit from the Roman amphitheatre in Carthage	1044
41.1	The amphitheatre at Carthage	1052
42.1	Head of Constantine from the Basilica of Constantine in Rome	1071
42.2	Relief of Constantine's triumphal entry into Rome	1076
43.1	The Monastery of Saint Anthony	1094
43.2	Entrance to Anthony's Cave near the top of the 'Inner Mountain'	1094
43.3	View from Anthony's Cave	1096
43.4	The temptations of Anthony as imagined by late sixteenth-century artists	1098
44.1	Icon of Athanasius	1103
44.2	Map of Roman Egypt	1105
44.3	The column of Diocletian from Alexandria	1111
44.4	Map of Alexandria	1115
44.5	The Caesarion in Alexandria at the turn of the nineteenth century	1116
44.6	Codex Sinaiticus from the fourth century	1119
44.7	Tapestry from fourth–fifth century Egypt	1121
45.1	Antioch-on-the-Orontes	1129
45.2	Constantinople c. 400 CE	1130
45.3	Solidi of emperor Theodosius I and empress Eudoxia	1135
45.4	Eleventh-century mosaic depicting John Chrysostom in Kiev	1137
46.1	Jerome, the greatest doctor of the church	1152
46.2	Jerome's tomb in St Catherine's church, Bethlehem	1154
47.1	Icon of St Ambrose	1176
47.2	Painting by Niccolò di Pietro of Augustine being baptized by Ambrose	1183
47.3	Map of Milan, c. 400, showing location of fourth-century churches	1198
48.1	Mosaic from Utica in North Africa depicting olive cultivation	1205
48.2	Remains of the Church of St Cyprian in Carthage	1213
48.3	Portrait of Augustine from a fourteenth-century Italian illuminated manuscript	1223
49.1	St Ephrem, as portrayed in a twelfth-century Syrian manuscript	1230

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Pritchard; 1991); *Social Networks in the Early Christian Environment* (1992), *The Social World of the First Christians* (with O. L. Yarbrough; 1995), and a two-volume work *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture* (1996–7). He is currently at work on a study of urban development and social change in the Roman East in order to understand the spread of early Christianity.

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PREFACE



The subject of this book is Christianity in the period 30 to 430 CE. Yet it is not a history of Christian literature, still less a description of the development of Christian theology. Rather, it offers a map of the rich phenomenon of early Christianity understood in the closest connection with the social context in which it was born and grew to maturity. The authors of the chapters have sought to highlight the social dimensions of their topics and many explicitly employ social-scientific methodology. The numerous illustrations bring out the extent to which the various contributions are embedded in the experience and realities of the ancient world.

Its title, *The Early Christian World*, hopefully conveys this breadth of scope. The book first examines the ancient Mediterranean context of Christianity, covering cultural, political, Greco-Roman and Jewish aspects (Part I), before setting out the broad lineaments of its history, from Jesus and Paul, on into the second and third centuries to Constantine and Theodosius and beyond (Part II). Part III focuses on community formation and maintenance, while Part IV deals with everyday Christian experience, in areas such as social levels, sexuality, women and mission, travel and worship. Part V takes up the intellectual heritage, especially in theology and scriptural interpretation, and Part VI focuses on the artistic heritage, in architecture, art, music and imaginative literature. Part VII explores external challenges to Christianity, such as political oppression and opposition of both a philosophical and popular kind, while Part VIII is concerned with internal challenges of the type more traditionally referred to as heresies, such as Gnosticism, Montanism, Donatism and Arianism. Lastly, Part IX profiles thirteen figures who had a major impact on early Christianity, twelve of them Christian and one, the apostate emperor Julian, who tried to turn back the Christian advance.

The book has been in the course of preparation since March 1996. Throughout this period Richard Stoneman, the Senior Editor (and now Publisher) with Routledge who commissioned it, offered wise and patient advice, as did Coco Stevenson as Assistant Editor and then Catherine Bousfield, Editorial Assistant. More recently, Kate Trench has worked tirelessly as Production Editor.

I am grateful to colleagues for discussions I had with them during the early stages of the project when I was formulating its overall shape and themes. Here I should especially mention Professor Richard Bauckham and Professor Trevor Hart of St

— *Preface* —

Mary's College and Professor Carolyn Osiek of the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. But I alone am responsible for what faults remain.

I am also enormously indebted to all those who have contributed essays to the volume, who have patiently borne with me throughout the time in which it has been in preparation. I must also thank Ms Susan Millar of St Mary's College who has devoted many hours to certain administrative tasks necessary to keep the book on course.

Lastly, this book is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Evelyn Esler, and my mother-in-law, Kathleen Curran – two Christian women *quae ministrabant ei de facultatibus suis*.

Philip F. Esler
St Mary's College in the University of St Andrews
15th May 2000

ABBREVIATIONS



ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen welt</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	British Archaeological Reports
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of American School of Oriental Research</i>
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
CCL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinorum</i>
CPG	<i>Clavis Patrum Graecorum</i> (5 vols plus supplementum, M. Geerard 1983–7; M. Geerard and J. Noret 1998, Brepols)
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> (Vienna 1865–)
FC	The Fathers of the Church
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
INJ	<i>Israel Numismatic Journal</i>
JA	Josephus, <i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JRA	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
JW	Josephus, <i>Jewish War</i>
LCC	Library of Christian Classics
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
MAMA	<i>Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua</i>
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version

— Abbreviations —

NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
<i>P.Gen.Inv</i>	<i>Les papyrus de Genève, inventaire</i>
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
<i>P.Oxy.</i>	<i>The Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i> , 1898–
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SC	Sources chrétiennes
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SVF</i>	<i>Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta</i> , ed. H. von Arnim (repr. Stuttgart, 1964)
<i>ZDPW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

PART I

THE CONTEXT



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CHAPTER ONE

THE MEDITERRANEAN CONTEXT OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY



Philip F. Esler

INTRODUCTION

During its first four centuries, from 30 to 430 CE, the phenomenon we now refer to as Christianity¹ was closely connected with the Mediterranean region, most of which was located within the Roman empire (Figure 1.1). Vital Christian heartlands, such as Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Asia Minor, Greece, Italy, North Africa, Narbonensis and Spain were all washed by the Mediterranean Sea (see Figure 1.1). Parts of the empire further afield, like Cappadocia, Pontus and Bithynia, and even Gaul and Britain, had been deeply affected by Mediterranean influences, either by their close proximity to the places just mentioned, or by the ubiquitous practices of Roman provincial administration, or both. There were Christians developing notable traditions somewhat away from the Mediterranean and outside the Roman empire, in places like Armenia, or even further afield, in India, but they were a small minority of the total Christian population. In any event, even they had been shaped by the missionaries from the Mediterranean countries who had evangelized them.

This context for early Christianity inevitably prompts three fundamental questions: first, in what sense are we able to speak of a Mediterranean region in the first five centuries of our era – that is, was it distinctive and, if so, how; second, what effect did the ensemble of natural and human features constituting this region have on the new religious movement struggling to be born and grow in its midst; and, third, what impact did Christianity have in turn on its Mediterranean context? Posing the matter like this involves acknowledging the validity of the insight from the sociology of knowledge that there is a dialectic relationship between social settings and the religious institutions and ideas which arise within them, with the settings contributing to the creation of the institutions and ideas, while they in turn have an impact on their social settings (Berger 1969: 41, 47; Esler 1994: 10). My aim in this chapter is to set out the broad outlines of an answer to the first of these questions, with occasional reference to the second and third, which constitute a central interest in the other chapters in this volume.

Although my focus will be on geographic, socio-economic and broad cultural questions, other contributors in Part I of this volume will deal with further aspects of the ancient Mediterranean context of Christianity, such as the political dominance



Figure 1.1 The Roman empire in 60 CE. Reproduced by permission of Routledge.



of Rome, or (from 330 CE) Rome and Constantinople together (Jill Harries in Chapter 2), Graeco-Roman philosophy and religion (Luther Martin in Chapter 3) and Judaism (James Aitken in Chapter 4).

THE MEDITERRANEAN AS A PHYSICALLY DISTINCTIVE REGION

Topography and climate

'The Mediterranean is a great gulf of the Atlantic cutting back into the land mass of the Eastern Hemisphere' (Semple 1932: 4). It carries the ocean 3,730 kilometres from the straits of Gibraltar to Lebanon, thus in effect giving Asia an Atlantic seaboard. It is enclosed by three continents – to the north, south and east. The northern, or European, coastline, measuring some 13,000 kilometres, is deeply dissected by peninsulas and islands, lying behind which is a fertile hinterland, these two features together providing the basis for the development of maritime trade. The southern, or African, coastline, only 5,000 kilometres long, is barely dissected at all by natural features and has lying behind it lands which are frequently arid, with Egypt, watered by the Nile, being the notable exception. The Eastern, or Asiatic, coastline is some 6,000 kilometres long, with much of this due to the deeply indented coastline of Asia Minor. Historically, the Asian part continually mediated between the great civilizations of the East, in the Tigris and Euphrates valleys and even India, and those in the West.

In geological terms the Mediterranean Sea is relatively young, occupying the areas of depression interposed between the belts of young folded mountains stretching across north-west Africa, southern Europe (especially the peninsulas of Spain, Italy and Greece) and the Asian ranges of the Caucasus and the Taurus. Throughout the region are found narrow coastal plains, while further inland deep valleys separate the folds of young mountains, or intersperse the old plateaus which survived the recent burst of mountain building. Extensive flat areas suitable for tillage are uncommon (Semple 1932: 4–34).

Similar climatic conditions occur across the Mediterranean lands. The characteristic pattern is that of winter rains and summer droughts. During summer, when the sun's rays are vertical at the equator, the Mediterranean is subjected to hot and dry north-east trade winds, which supplant the rain-bearing westerly winds of winter and a heat belt moves north from Saharan Africa. In winter the reverse occurs, and the westerlies sweep in across the sea dropping their precipitation, especially when they meet obstacles such as the mountains of Lebanon and Palestine. In many areas the summer drought is hard on vegetation, and irrigation may be necessary to maintain plant growth (Semple 1932: 83–101).

Yet the region produces staple cereals (which are generally sown in autumn around the onset of the rains and harvested in early summer), vegetables and fruits (including figs and grapes), and, while providing reasonable pasturage for small animals, especially sheep and goats, is not so good for cattle. Most characteristic of the Mediterranean is the ubiquitous olive, whose deep roots allow it to survive the

summer drought and produce the oil which in the ancient period was eaten, burnt to provide illumination and used for anointing the skin. The olive takes several years to produce its first fruit and is a reminder of the sedentary nature of Mediterranean life (Finley [1973] 1985: 31).

The steady north-east trade winds, which the Greeks called 'Etesian', appear in late May and begin to fade in mid-September. For the ancients this was the only safe season for sailing in the Mediterranean. The cyclonic storms typical of winter made navigation hazardous. Hesiod advised his readers 'to avoid the winter sea when the winds war loud' (*Works and Days*, 619–25). Merchant vessels operated between 10 March and 10 November, but the safe period was from May to September (Semple 1932: 579–81).

Ancient Greek and Roman views on the Mediterranean as a distinct region

The fact that modern people are accustomed, for a variety of reasons, such as its geomorphic structure, climate, culture and vegetation, to think of the Mediterranean as a distinctive region – especially in contrast to Northern Europe – does not necessarily mean that its ancient inhabitants had a similar understanding. Nevertheless, the ancient Mediterranean did have a regional identity and its inhabitants recognized this.

The Greeks and Romans broadly divided the area surrounding the Mediterranean Sea into the three continents of Europe, Asia and Africa (which they called Libya: Herodotus, 4.42; Strabo, Book 1). Herodotus (writing c. 450 BCE) shrewdly pointed out that Europe is as long as the other two put together (*Histories* 4.42),² and he, like the rest of the ancient world, was richly aware of the huge variety of locales, peoples, languages and customs, represented around and inland from its shores. Yet in spite of this diversity, the sea itself permitted reasonably easy communication between all of these areas and groups. A remarkably useful discovery like a phonetic alphabet, deployed soon after its discovery by Semitic peoples such as Israelites and Phoenicians, was soon adopted by the Greeks with whom the latter traded. Technological and artistic developments, religious cults, philosophic ideas and literary genres quickly spread across the region. Greek, and later Latin, became a widely used lingua franca. 'Ceaseless intercourse back and forth along "the wet ways" bound together the Mediterranean peoples into one great community life' (Semple 1932: 11). In due course, the Mediterranean would become a vital highway for the spread and institutionalization of the Christian message (see Chapter 18 of this volume).

The ancient Greeks and Romans recognized this sense of regionality. Plato's Socrates said of those who lived between the Phasis river (in the east) and the Pillars of Heracles (that is, the straits of Gibraltar in the west) that 'living around the sea we are like ants or frogs around a pond' (*Phaedo* 109B). The Romans called the region the *orbis terrarum*, the circle of lands, a notion also invoked by an anonymous Greek lyric poet who wrote of 'the sea-bound circle of the whole dry land' (Paton 1917: 375). Greeks and Romans referred to the Mediterranean as 'our sea', 'this sea' and, simply, 'the sea'. Ancient books of travel were often of the *periplus* or coasting-voyage type; by sailing around the Mediterranean one could describe the world.

Ancient Mediterranean map-making

This sense of regionality emerged in ancient attempts to map the world. Older understandings of the cosmos assumed a flat earth, circular in shape and often surrounded by ocean. The Mesopotamian version of this model (which is well represented in the Old Testament) consisted of a flat triple-decker universe, divided into heaven, earth and underworld. Herodotus (writing *c.* 450 BCE) scoffed at map-makers who drew the earth in perfectly circular fashion, with Oceanus running round the circumference, and with Europe and Asia of roughly equal size (*Histories* 4.36). He may well have had the maps of Anaximander and Hecataeus, both of Miletus, in his sights (Kirk and Raven 1971: 104). Figure 1.2 is a reasonable modern reconstruction of what such a map might have looked like.³ Such attempts naturally situated 'our sea' near the centre of the world.

By the beginning of the first century CE, however, these cosmologies had largely been replaced in educated Greek and Roman circles by the realization that the earth was a sphere, not a disc. As early as the second half of the sixth century BCE Pythagoras and Parmenides of Elea had proposed a spherical earth (Dilke 1985: 25). Aristotle (384–322 BCE) offered proofs for the earth's sphericity, such as the earth throwing a round shadow on the moon at eclipses (Thomson 1948: 118; Aristotle, *de Caelo* 297b) and Eratosthenes (*c.* 275–194 BCE) actually achieved a remarkably accurate measurement of its circumference of around 25,000 miles (Thomson 1948: 159–61).

The inhabited quadrant of the globe (which the Greeks called the *oikoumene*) was thought to stretch roughly from the straits of Gibraltar in the west to India and China in the east. While residing in Rome in about 168 BCE Crates of Pergamum designed an orb which set out the position of the *oikoumene* in relation to other

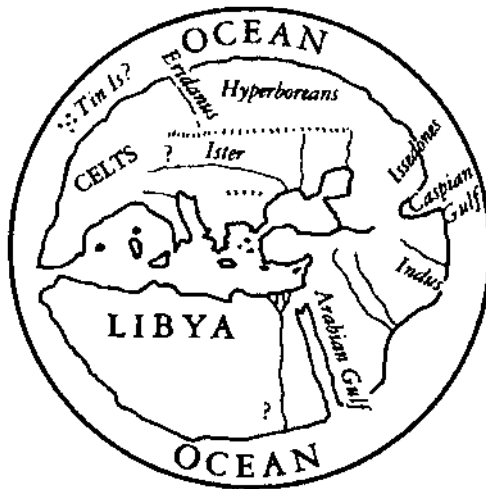


Figure 1.2 Conjectural reconstruction of Hecataeus' map of the world. From Dilke (1985: 56).



Figure 1.3 Reconstruction of Crates' Orb, a terrestrial globe made *c.* 170–160 BCE to make sense of Homeric geography. From Dilke (1985: 36).

(imagined) parts of the globe (Strabo 2.5.10; Dilke 1985: 36), as conjectured in Figure 1.3.

From as early as the fifth century BCE thought was being given to the need to map the *oikoumene* of the globe onto a flat surface and what shape to give it, with Democritus of Abdera opting for an oblong with the proportion of length (east–west) to width (north–south) as 3:2 (Dilke 1985: 25). Eratosthenes produced what may be regarded as the first really scientific map (Dilke 1985: 33–5). Figure 1.4 suggests what this might have been like.

In the period before his death in 12 BCE Marcus Agrippa, a close supporter of Octavian, had begun to erect a world map in Rome, which Octavian completed after Agrippa's death. It was extremely detailed, both as to place-names and distances between places (Dilke 1985: 41–53). With the collapse of Rome, however, older and more primitive cosmologies would once again come to the fore (Thomson 1948: 351–91). Overly intrepid voyagers would later be warned of the perils of falling off the world's edge.

CULTURAL ASPECTS OF CONTEXT

An initial caveat: the issue of cultural difference

'Culture' refers to the totality of efforts by human beings to create a world for themselves, material and non-material, with the latter including phenomena such as social relations, roles, values and institutions. A preliminary problem which arises in considering any foreign culture, whether distant from us in space or time, is the fact that our immersion in our own culture equips us with a whole set of cues for understanding non-material social features which might well get in the way of our

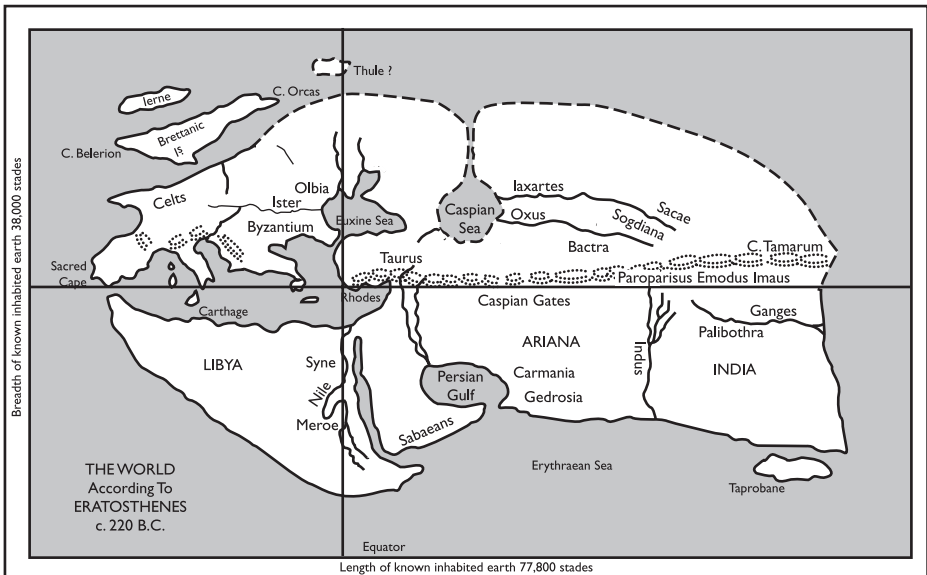


Figure 1.4 Simplified reconstruction of Eratosthenes' map of the inhabited quadrant of the globe – the *oikoumene*. From Dilke (1985: 33).

comprehending the other culture. Unless we are careful, we are likely to project ethnocentric or anachronistic interpretations onto other human subjects – in effect, to make the unfortunate blunder of assuming that they are really like us when they might differ in all sorts of ways which they, and we, would consider significant. Eminent ancient historian Peter Brown has spoken of the need to remove 'the patina of the obvious' from that which we are investigating (1972: 18–20). An increasing number of commentators, in the biblical and classical fields, have discovered recently that one way to remove this patina is by drawing upon the recent anthropological research into the modern Mediterranean. This research provides us with a valuable set of social scenarios, or strategies, which are heuristic tools not social laws, for interpreting the data. Although these scenarios are not necessarily those of the ancient Mediterranean, the measure of similarity is striking. Moreover, they are certainly far more appropriate than the (usually unrecognized) scenarios derived from modern Northern European and North American individualism which so often undergird modern interpretations in this field.

The initial stage of anthropological research into the Mediterranean region is found in the work written or edited by Pitt-Rivers ([1955] 1961, 1963, 1965, 1977), Campbell (1964), Peristiany (1965), Bourdieu (1965), Davis (1977) and many of the chapters in Gilmore (1987), to mention only some of the main examples. Much of this work stressed honour as the primary value in Mediterranean society, meaning a person's claim to worth and the social acknowledgement of that claim, the opposite of which is shame. More recently, some anthropologists, such as Herzfeld (1984, 1987), have criticized the pan-Mediterranean value system proposed in the first generation of research. In so far as Herzfeld has warned us

against the reification of the Mediterranean area, his contributions are welcome. Contemporary anthropologists should always test the findings of earlier generations of research in relation to new contexts and new perspectives, such as those of a feminist or post-modernist motivation. Nevertheless, the newer work does not necessitate that the older results are now outmoded, only that we should be alert to the possibility of diversity and nuance in ways we had not previously appreciated. The research of the last ten to fifteen years represents a vigorous and critical development of the field, not its rejection or replacement. To cite but one example, while Abu-Lughod has provided a more nuanced picture of the role and influence of women in Bedouin culture (1986), she still depends on the original discoveries in the field (usually made by male anthropologists who simply did not have great access to female informants) when she observes that 'individuals in Bedouin society appear able to express through poetry the sentiments of weakness that violate the honor code' (1986: 233).

A macrosociological dimension: an advanced agrarian society

Agricultural surplus, urban elite and the peasantry

The first dimension of the cultural aspects of the Mediterranean context we need to consider is the broad socio-economic system of the ancient Mediterranean world. Here, to organize our approach to the subject and to raise a useful agenda of questions, it helps to borrow some insights from macrosociology, in particular the approach to that field elaborated by Gerhard Lenski and Jean Lenski (1987). The Lenskis focus upon the development of social systems from a preindustrial stage, beginning with hunting and gathering societies, proceeding to horticultural societies, and then agrarian (simple and advanced) before moving on to industrial and industrializing societies (Lenski and Lenski 1987). Their model is further explained and utilized by Richard Rohrbaugh in Chapter 8 of this volume.

Mediterranean societies in the period in question can be analysed in terms of what Lenski and Lenski call the advanced agrarian type. Since this is really part of a model of the socio-economic system, and a model drawn at a fairly high level of abstraction, not an empirical description of such a system, the following account in no way precludes variations across time and space,⁴ even on matters as fundamental as the contrast between the typical prevalence of state ownership of land in the temple-states of the ancient Near East and the widespread private ownership of land in Greece and Rome (Finley [1973] 1985: 28–9).

The advanced agrarian stage was characterized at a technological level by the use of the plough, which allowed permanent cultivation of a much larger area of land than among horticulturists and which thus facilitated the production of agricultural surpluses. In response to these surpluses a broad social and political structure tended to develop. Typically, a tiny ruling elite (2–5 per cent of the population), centred in cities, exercised authority over large numbers of peasants and took a large proportion of their surplus to support their often luxurious life in the city and the religious cult or cults which it contained. As time went on, especially with the introduction of iron ploughs in the first millennium BCE which increased production even more, the

number of 'retainers' catering directly to the needs of the elite, such as household servants, stewards and scribes, together with other groups serving them indirectly such as artisans and merchants, grew considerably.

As well as controlling the means of economic production, the elite enjoyed most political power and status and had a virtual monopoly on literacy through their control over trained scribes. Very few peasants usually learn to read and write in this type of culture (Harris 1989). There was an enormous social distance between those at the top of this extremely hierarchical society and those at the bottom, generally attended by the scorn the elite felt for the non-elite (see Figure 8.2 on this approach to stratification as applied to Herodian Palestine).

Yet we should always be open to the complexity of the data, and augment or amend our models whenever necessary. Thus, Averil Cameron (1991: 30) argues that although the Roman empire of the first two centuries CE was characterized by a strong horizontal demarcation between an educated elite and the rest of society, by the fourth century CE the situation had significantly changed: the civil and military had separated, an increase in government posts had opened up the old elite and confused demarcation lines, and traditional culture was being challenged by an alternative Christian one, and there was an alternative elite in the form of Christian bishops.

Peter Garnsey has also argued for another dimension to changes in the empire from the first to the fourth centuries – the decline of the urban aristocracy (1998a).⁵ At the beginning of the period the members of the urban elite of the cities across the provinces of the empire, the decurions or *curiales*, were required to bear the brunt of the financial burdens of imperial administration (the *munera*). Using the resources derived largely from their rural holdings, they held magistracies, constructed buildings, paid for religious cults and liturgies and distributed largesse to the citizenry, with the significant enhancement to their honour (see pp. 16–18) which resulted representing adequate compensation for the heavy expenditure. Possibly as early as the late third century, and certainly by the fourth, however, various factors, such as the mounting costs of government and a decline in local prosperity, meant that these responsibilities had lost their appeal. Faced with a flight of decurions from the cities, the imperial government responded by seeking to block their entry into other areas of life, in effect trying to turn them into an hereditary order, even if this was never successfully achieved – and a succession of imperial decrees in the Theodosian code directing errant decurions to return to their cities to perform liturgies suggests that it was not (Garnsey 1998b: 3). In the fourth century, imperial exemption of Christian clergy from the duties of the decurionate, such as that enacted by an edict of Constantine on 21 October 319 (*Codex Theodosianus* 16.2.2; Croke and Harries 1982: 16) proved a most valuable benefit.

Conditions for the non-elite

Life for the non-elite members of ancient society in agrarian societies of the advanced agrarian type tended to be difficult, although it is useful to distinguish between those who were free in status and those who were unfree. The largest component of those free was the peasantry. By the time peasants had paid taxes to the local

political ruler and often to the local temple as well, there might be little left to support themselves and their families. Hunger was common, and the peasantry could even be drafted into military service or made to work on construction projects. Poor harvests generally meant that the peasants had to borrow at high interest rates, with the loans often secured against their next crop or their land itself. A very visible sign of this was the way in which the elite acquired peasants' land, by taking over fields which had been used to secure loans. It was very common for peasants to be forced off their land in these circumstances and to become tenant farmers, landless labourers or even beggars. These pressures sometimes led to the flight of peasants from the land altogether and to the consequent break up of families. Right across the empire, as Garnsey notes (1998c: 93), the expansion of elite land ownership in the form of concentrated holdings, or *latifundia*, worked largely by slaves, meant that this was a world 'in which peasant proprietors were being steadily transformed into tenant farmers, agricultural labourers, unemployed and underemployed urban residents'. The history of the Roman empire in the first four centuries of Christianity repeatedly reveals the consequences of imperial or local pressures caused by extractive processes on the peasantry (see also Finley [1973] 1985: 102–9).

Indeed, the large number of slaves on the land in Italy and other parts of the empire, including Greece, mean that peasants should not be the total focus of enquiry. Rome is often referred to as a 'slave state' (Garnsey 1998c: 91). On the other hand, recent research has suggested that it is a mistake to differentiate too sharply between slaves and freemen in the area of agricultural production. Peasants comprise various groups, such as those who own their own land, those who rent land from others and landless agricultural labourers. All three groups need at times to work on other people's holdings, and this was certainly the case with the peasants of the ancient Mediterranean – even to the extent of their lending a hand to the regular slave workforce on *latifundia* at certain times of the year (Garnsey 1998d; Rathbone 1981: 19). Ironically, slaves (at least those capable of work) probably went hungry less frequently than peasants, since they were provided for from the resources of their wealthy owners, which is not to say that we should underestimate the possibility for savage treatment of slaves even in an urban environment.

The ancient Mediterranean economy

'Economics' did not exist as a separate area of enquiry in the ancient Mediterranean. The very word derives, in fact, from *oikonomia*, meaning the management of the *oikos*, or private household – a subject in which there was a keen interest (as in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*). More than this, however, the ancient world did not possess an 'economy', in the modern sense of an autonomous area of human interaction largely separate from other social features and governed by the use of money and markets, with associated arrangements for trade and exchange. Karl Polanyi persuasively argued in *The Great Transformation* (1944) that the movement from a preindustrial society (such as that of the ancient Mediterranean) to an industrial one was marked by a transition from an 'embedded' economy to a 'disembedded' one. In the ancient world what we refer to as the economic aspects of a social system (pre-eminently the city) were subordinated to other features of which the most important

were kinship, politics and religion. Commentators who follow this approach and insist that ancient economic realities can only be understood within this framework are called (perhaps not very helpfully) 'substantivists', while those who, on the other hand, insist that modern formal economic concepts are applicable to preindustrial, non-market economies are referred to as 'formalists' (Kaplan 1968).

One of the most significant 'substantivist' contributions to study in this area came with the publication of *The Ancient Economy* by Moses Finley in 1973. In a manner consonant with the Lenski and Lenski model set out above, he argued strongly for an idea of Max Weber's that the ancient city was a 'consumption centre', parasitically living off the produce of the surrounding countryside, while not engaging much in manufacturing and offering little in return ([1973] 1985: 125–6). Although Finley did recognize that some cities were commercial centres ([1973] 1985: 126–131), one critique of his views in the debate he provoked has been that he has underestimated the extent of the services ancient cities did provide to the surrounding areas or further afield. Donald Engels has argued such a case for Corinth, for example, calling it a 'service city' (1990). Much the same case could probably be made for Ostia, Rome's port at the mouth of the Tiber, through which a huge amount of produce was channelled to the capital, being unloaded from ocean-going boats in its harbour and then shipped up the river on barges. The impressive array of commercial buildings in the current ruins of Ostia testify to the vibrancy of this trade and the large number of personnel who must have been engaged in it (see Figure 15.3, of commercial premises in Ostia).

Yet we should not let the atypical displace our understanding of the typical. While the possibility of existing on trade was very real for maritime cities, especially those as favoured in their location as Corinth or Ostia, for inland cities the difficulties and great cost of transport and the abiding realities of the grip of the elite on the peasantry across the region make Finley's by far the more attractive model (Oakman 1996). Nor can there be much doubt that the most significant economic reality in the ancient Mediterranean in the first few centuries of the Christian era was the extent to which Rome (with its population of about one million – Garnsey and Saller 1987: 62) drained resources out of the provinces in the form of taxes, especially huge shipments of wheat from Egypt, to supply its large population, including the retainers who served the emperor. This is a good example of the extent to which the realities of imperial power and economic issues were closely integrated. This process has been usefully modelled by Douglas Oakman (see Figure 1.5).

Garnsey and Saller describe the Roman economy as 'undeveloped', by which they mean (at an admittedly high level of generality) that the mass of the population lived at a subsistence level off agricultural production, that the level of investment in manufacturing activities was low and that there was little in the way of an entrepreneurial class. Poor transport facilities added both to the cost and the risk of manufacturing and trade, which is not to say that some areas of manufacture (for example of pottery) or of trade (as with wheat, olive oil and wine moving from Egypt, other parts of North Africa and Spain to Rome in large quantities) did not develop in spite of the difficulties. The prevalence of an aristocratic ideology which was inimical to any profitable enterprise except agriculture production restricted the development of a prosperous and confident merchant class (Garnsey and Saller 1987: 43–5).

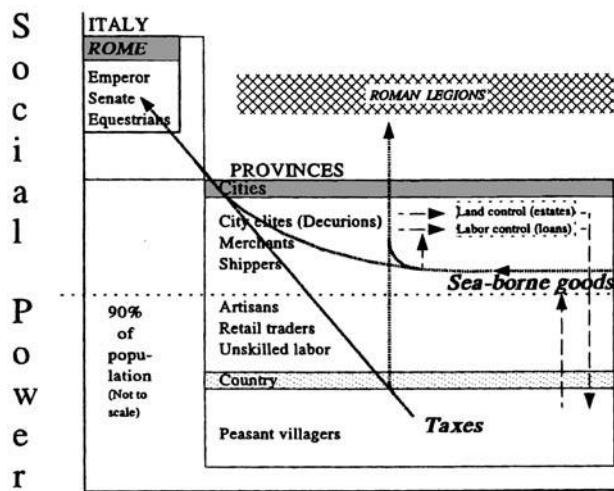


Figure 1.5 Roman political economy: a systems model. From Oakman (1993: 204; slightly modified).

Religion, kinship and politics

As with 'economics', it is anachronistic to speak of 'religion' as having an existence separate from politics or the family in the context of the ancient Mediterranean world. Across the region the features we label as 'religious' institutions and ideas were also embedded either in structures of political dominance such as the temples of officially recognized cults put in place by local aristocratic elites (including the imperial cult), or in the household. There was political religion and domestic religion, but not 'religion' *per se*. Political religion employed the roles, values and aims of politics in religious ideologies and rites. It was characterized by functionaries combining cultic and political functions and tending powerful deities who provided well-being and prosperity or, if provoked, their opposite. Political religion was legitimated in 'the Great Tradition' (Redfield 1956: 68–84), the high and learned culture of the elite. Domestic religion, on the other hand, used the roles, values and aims of the household in religious expression. Its functionaries, to the extent that it had them, were family members, and it focused on the deities as the source of familial solidarity and commitment, and well-being for the family members (Malina 1986, 1994, 1996). Domestic religion was legitimated in 'the Little Tradition', the low or folk culture of the non-elite.

Persons, roles and values in the ancient Mediterranean world

The usefulness of anthropological research into contemporary Mediterranean culture for understanding ancient social patterns has been proposed and defended above. In this section I will briefly set out some of the main results of this research – in relation to group-orientation, honour and shame, limited good and patronage – and indicate how it may help us contextualize and interpret ancient data in ways less

likely to be affected by ethnocentrism and anachronism than approaches which do not avail themselves of social-scientific assistance.

Group-orientation

Perhaps the greatest difference between modern Northern European and North American cultures, or 'North Atlantic cultures hereafter',⁶ and those of contemporary Mediterranean societies is the prevalence of individualism in the former and a strong sense of group orientation in the latter. By 'individualism' I mean the notion that to a large extent persons find fulfilment in life through their own individual efforts – by thinking for themselves, by striking out on their own, for example by leaving their parents' home at an early stage to build a career in another city, and so on. 'Individualism' fosters virtues such as self-reliance, innovativeness and a capacity for introspection. 'Individualism' is not the same as 'individuality', which simply refers to the phenomenon of each person having the capacity to present himself or herself as a distinctive individual in relation to other persons, most notably by being pre-eminent in some way, and which characterizes all societies, whether they are individualistic or not, or ancient or modern.

Most of the world is not individualistic in the sense just set out, although many people socialized in North Atlantic cultures often fail to see this. The more common pattern is of group-orientation, where individuals achieve fulfilment in relation to significant groups. The family is by far the most important group in such settings, although other groups such as one's village, town or city, tribe, or *ethnos* also play a major role. In group-oriented cultures, individuals tend to align their activities and attitudes with those of the groups to which they belong. Typical virtues in such contexts are obedience to elders, respect for tradition, a willingness to share goods with other group members and a pronounced tendency to represent the group in its relations to other groups, which is often associated with inter-group competitiveness. One finding from recent research into the Mediterranean region has been the prevalence of group-orientation in cultures as far afield as Iraq in the east and Spain in the west. The word 'dyadic' is sometimes applied to group-oriented personality (Malina [1981] 1993: 67–71), but its connotation of pairs, 'dyads', rather than larger groups, perhaps renders it not wholly appropriate.

Honour and shame

A central value in the modern Mediterranean is honour, meaning one's own sense of worth and the corroboration of that understanding by a relevant group, typically the village in which one lives. The opposite of honour is shame. While honour and shame take on different connotations in different settings around the Mediterranean, so that we must always be alive to their particular nuances, its foundational role in Mediterranean social relations is quite remarkable. Honour can either be ascribed (that is, simply attributed to a person by virtue of birth or position) or achieved (that is, actively gained from another in various social arenas in forms of interaction described as the pattern of challenge-and-response). The desire to obtain honour motivates many interactions between individuals and the groups whom they repre-

sent. In the last two decades many New Testament critics, stimulated by Bruce Malina's foundational text *The New Testament World* ([1981] 1993) have utilized the centrality of honour to approach the biblical texts in quite fresh ways. Some classical scholars have moved in the same direction, as in J. E. Lendon's 1997 work *Empire of Honour: The Art of Government in the Roman World*, which offers a nuanced account of the role of honour in the pattern of imperial control, but without neglecting other aspects of the system, including wealth and power.

There are two aspects to the close connection between the fact of group-orientation and the importance of this value. First, while individuals do seek honour for themselves, the groups to whom they belong will also share in that honour and, second, its very existence is dependent on the opinion of some larger social grouping. The Mediterranean world is, and was, intensely competitive. Individuals and groups continually strove with one another to promote their individual or group honour at the expense of some other person or group. The conflict-ridden nature of this culture has led some to refer to it as agonistic (Malina [1981] 1993: 37). The Roman triumph, for example, was an institution which celebrated a major (and necessarily bloody) victory of Roman armies over their enemies by offering a status elevation ritual for the emperor and his legions and a status degradation ritual for the defeated nations, whose representatives were paraded along in the procession (Esler 1995c: 242–5). If a slight to the honour of oneself or one's group could not be rectified immediately, ancient Mediterranean people nursed powerful hopes of revenge until it could be.

Gender is closely connected with honour and shame, especially to the extent that women must keep within the authority of the men in their lives, either fathers, brothers or husbands, if the men are to preserve their honour. Shame also refers to a woman's honour; her 'shame' is something she must preserve. If a man's daughter, sister or wife is seduced, not only has the woman lost her shame, but her father, brother or husband incur gross dishonour which will require heavy vengeance to restore the *status quo ante*. Thus honour is held by groups as well as the individuals who represent those groups in dealings with outsiders. This pattern is an exceedingly common one across the Mediterranean. In many parts of the Mediterranean women are, where economically possible, largely relegated to the private sphere of the house, while men operate in the public sphere.

One could choose to compare aspects of the anthropological model set out above with many of the social realities of the Roman empire in the period 66–430 CE. I will cite two examples. First of all, J. E. Lendon has recently presented a cogent case for the important role of honour in the area of imperial control (1997). Second, and more specifically, Peter Brown has developed an argument which is particularly helpful here. Brown suggests that in the golden years of the empire, in the period up to about 260 CE, the age of the Antonines, the Graeco-Roman elites were motivated by *philotimia*, love of honour. Propelled by *philotimia*, individual members of the elite strove to outshine one another in the generosity of the services they offered their local *polis*, as recorded in the huge number of inscriptions which survive. But the strong competitive urges were channelled into or at least mitigated by attention to the collective life of the town. 'The competitiveness of *philotimia* still assumed and needed, as it had done for centuries, an audience of significant others who were

potential competitors' (Brown 1978: 31). This behaviour aligns closely with that of the model. The elite of this period maintained a strong set of invisible boundaries which circumscribed the aspirations of individuals and directed them into 'forms of achievement that could potentially be shared by all members in the peer group' (Brown 1978: 35). Moreover, the notion of limited good (explained immediately below) prevailed. Goods were there to be spent and not hoarded. Those who accumulated too much were cut down to size. Members of the elite could insure themselves against envy by lavishing funds on the *polis*, for example to maintain its cults.

Limited good

A factor which sharpens occasions of competition in Mediterranean society is the notion of 'the limited good'. In many cultures not affected by the industrial and green revolutions the notion of expanding production is unknown and, as matter of fact, some societies in the past may have witnessed little growth in economic output. Thus it is doubtful, though possible, that there was economic growth in the Roman empire in the first century CE – see Garnsey and Saller (1987: 51–63). In such a case all goods are thought to exist in finite quantities and, often, are treated as indivisible, so that someone can accumulate a surplus of any good, including honour, only at the expense of someone else. In ancient Israel Esau found that Isaac had only one blessing to give and it had gone to Jacob (Gen. 27: 36–40). The idea was originally formulated in relation to Mexican peasants (Foster 1967; also cf. Malina [1981] 1993: 103–12), but it can be found in many other areas at an advanced agrarian stage of development. An honourable man does not try to build up a hoard of goods which may excite dangerous envy among his peers. Similarly, profiting from trade may be seen as theft. Instead, an honourable man strives to preserve what he has.

Applied to the competitions for honour into which social equals enter in Mediterranean culture (ancient and modern) in virtually any area of social interaction, a social dynamic called 'challenge-and-response', limited good means that there is only so much honour to be obtained in the exchange and that it will be a case of winner takes all.

Patron and client relations

A typical feature of Mediterranean culture is the existence of patron–client relations. These are social relationships between individuals based on a strong element of inequality and difference in power which permit the exchange of different and very unequal resources. Typically, a member of an urban elite will share some of his social, economic and political resources (including legal advice) to people lower on the social scale, who, in return, will give him expressions of loyalty and honour that are useful in one way or another (Moxnes 1991: 242). Often there will be a middle man, a broker, who mediates the exchange of the various benefits between clients and a more powerful patron. The broker will function as a client to the ultimate patron and as patron to the ultimate clients (Moxnes 1991: 248–9).

Patron–broker–client relations are explicable as a way of overcoming the extremely stratified nature of Mediterranean society and the limited nature of its

resources, but also of investing relationships with people who are not kin with some of the characteristics of the reciprocity and even emotional attachment which characterizes the household. Thus we may regard patron–client relations as a form of fictive kinship.

When one turns to the ancient data, it is apparent that patron–client relations were a prominent feature of Roman life during both the Republic and the empire (Saller 1982). Members of the Republican elite, senators especially, had groups of clients whom they would receive at their homes early in the morning. Perhaps the most interesting evidence for the centrality of patronage in the Republic is found in the text *Commentariolum Petitionis* ('Handbook of Electioneering'), which purports to be advice given to Marcus Tullius Cicero by his younger brother Quintus to help him win the election to consulship in 63 BCE. Much of this text is occupied with obtaining large numbers of 'friends' (a polite word as between patron and clients, since '*cliens*' was regarded as degrading – Garnsey and Saller 1987: 152) who will agitate on Cicero's behalf. Here is a small sample of the advice to Cicero:

Inquire and seek out men everywhere, get to know them, pursue them, secure them, see that they canvass their localities for you and act like candidates on your behalf. They will want you as a friend if they see you are anxious for their friendship; pursue the object of making them understand the point by using discourse appropriate to the purpose. Small-town and country folk think themselves our friends if we know them by name; and if they think they are gaining some protection for themselves, they lose no opportunity of deserving it.

(8.31; Henderson 1989: 771–3)

Or again:

I am very anxious that you should always have a crowd about you; I think it important to the occasion. Further, it will bring you great credit and high prestige if you have around you those whom you have defended, who have been preserved and saved from condemnation by you. Demand of them plainly that since it is due to your unpaid efforts that they have retained their property, or their reputation, or their life and all their fortunes, and since there will never be another chance for them to thank you, they should repay you by this service.

(10.38; Henderson 1989: 777)

Cameron (1991: 76) notes, however, that there were changes later; thus in the empire, when political office came largely through imperial patronage, individual members of the elite no longer had to appeal to the people for support. Yet this simply meant that patrons and clients chose other areas to cement their relationships, from the emperor down. Thus, as far as the emperors themselves went, Augustus set the pattern early by seeking to legitimate his reign by the traditional patterns of patronage and benefaction (Garnsey and Saller 1987: 149). He left an account of his reign, the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, largely extant on an inscription in Ankara (see Figure 1.6), much of which (Chapters 15–24 out of 35) is taken up with an account of the staggering level of benefits and services he provided to the Roman people. Here is a sample:



Figure 1.6 The *Res Gestae* of Augustus, in the Temple of Rome and Augustus, Ankara. Photo J. C. N. Coulston.

In the eighteenth year of my tribunician power and my twelfth consulship (5 BCE) I gave 240 sesterces apiece to 320,000 members of the urban plebs. In my fifth consulship (29 BCE) I gave 1,000 sesterces out of booty to every one of the colonists drawn from my soldiers; about 120,000 men in the colonies received this largesse at the time of my triumph.

(15.2–3; translation Brunt and Moore 1967: 25–7)

Yet the whole system of keeping the Roman plebs fed and content on ‘bread and circuses’ illustrates the perennial nature of such support. As subjects, especially so many of them, the city population could not repay such imperial gifts in any direct or specific way, and Garnsey and Saller correctly note that the reciprocity ethic demanded that they make a return in the form of deference, respect and loyalty (1987: 149). This is rather similar to the position taken by the author of the *Commentariolum Petitionis* in the second of the two quotations given previously.

The emperors became patrons to a large number of members of the elite, many of whom were charged with important roles in the administration of Rome or the provinces. Some of the rewards that went with such imperial preferment were used by their recipients to bestow patronage on others further down the social hierarchy. Provincial governors functioned as brokers between the local population and the empire. In other words, the emperor did not become a universal patron to the exclusion of other patrons, but rather worked within the traditional patterns to

allow the aristocracy to continue to exercise patronal influence as they had always done (Garnsey and Saller 1987: 150).

There is evidence in the New Testament for how this system worked at the local level in Palestine in the story told by Luke of the centurion of Capernaum with a sick servant (7:1–10). He is able to send Jewish elders to plead with Jesus, so that they act as his clients. They tell Jesus that ‘He deserves this of you because he is friendly towards our people; in fact he is the one who built our synagogue’ (Luke 7:5).

It has been suggested by Millet that Athens was an exception to the rest of the region in not being characterized by patron–client relations, on the basis that this sort of social arrangement was incompatible with Athenian democracy (1990). This seems rather unlikely, however, and the fact that Aristotle specifically speaks of unequal friendships (*Nicomachean Ethics* 8.14), which sounds very much like patronage, suggests we should be cautious in denying this social feature to Athens. The lack of a specific language of patronage at Athens parallel to what we have from Rome does not mean that patron–client relations did not exist there.

After Christianity became a legitimate religion with the Edict of Milan in 313 CE, bishops with family wealth behind them, such as Ambrose, continued to operate within the ancient framework of patronage and benefaction – for example by paying for the construction of churches (see Chapter 47 of this volume).

CONCLUSION

The discussion above justifies us treating the Mediterranean region as having, at least at a reasonably high level of abstraction, an ensemble of distinctive natural and cultural features which left their mark on early Christianity in a wide variety of ways which will emerge in many of the chapters of this volume. None of this means that we should underestimate the huge variety of social features across the region nor our considerable ignorance in many areas; Cameron notes that even on something as fundamental as the shape of urban life, ‘We remain very much in the dark about the social composition of most cities’ (1991: 45).

Nor should we forget, as noted at the start of this chapter, that the relationship between a religion and its social setting is a dialectical one, with setting influencing religious life and beliefs, while the latter can have a profound impact on the setting. As Cameron, again, has noted, looking at the way things developed to Constantine and beyond, Christianity and the empire affected one another – it was a dynamic process in which both sides were changing (1991: 4). Christianity ‘placed an extraordinary premium on verbal formulation’ and this led to an attempt, largely successful, to impose an authority of discourse which itself came to be the dominant one in the state. Thus the story of the development of Christian discourse forms part of political history (1991: 19).

In the end, however, any attempt to understand early Christianity apart from the unique cultural context of the ancient Mediterranean in which it was born will lead to a misleading and emaciated form of intellectual history dangerously divorced from the realities of human experience. ‘The Word was made flesh’, wrote the Fourth Evangelist, thus provoking or at least enriching centuries of speculation as to the

nature of Christ, before adding a clause which is generally given far less attention: 'and dwelt amongst us' (John 1:14). Thus, the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel recognizes that the heart of Christian existence is not simply a statement about the nature of Christ *in abstracto*, but rather an affirmation that this reality found its embodiment within the natural and cultural aspects of everyday Mediterranean society. Even one of the most exalted theological passages in the New Testament strongly encourages us to pay these features our closest attention.

NOTES

- 1 The terms 'Christian' and 'Christianity' are anachronistic for at least the early part of this period, until the end of the first century CE and even for some time beyond. Not only was the word *Christianos* (which appears only three times in the New Testament: Acts 11:26 and 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16) not used by those who followed Christ as a term of self-designation until later, but 'Christian' conveys such particular associations from the later course of the movement as to obscure important aspects of its rather fluid and developing identity at this early time.
- 2 As already noted, the coastline of Europe is about 13,000 kilometres, whereas that of Africa is 5,000 kilometres and of Asia 6,000 kilometres (Semple 1932: 5–7).
- 3 Herodotus did not dispute a flat earth, but argued against Europe, Asia and Libya being the same size and professed ignorance as to whether Europe was surrounded by sea.
- 4 On the use of models in the analysis of ancient social phenomena, see Esler (1987: 6–16, 1995b: 4–8) and Elliott (1995: 36–59).
- 5 A detailed account of the way Garnsey's views on this subject (originally published in 1974) have been received is provided in the addendum by Walter Schiedel at pp. 4–17 of Garnsey (1998a).
- 6 One should also include here ex-colonial offshoots of these cultures, such as Australia and New Zealand.

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ARMIES, EMPERORS AND BUREAUCRATS

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Jill Harries

Early in the fifth century CE, the Spanish Christian historian Orosius, author of a *History Against the Pagans*, written at the request of Augustine, recalled how Christ came into a Roman world united and at peace:

In the whole world there was one peace among all, not because of the cessation of wars, but because of their abolition; . . . that first and greatest census was taken, since in this one name of Caesar all the peoples of the great nations took oath, and at the same time, through participation in the census, were made part of one society.

(Orosius, 7.2; Deferrari 1964 trans.: 287)

Orosius wrote at a time when Christianity had triumphed over its religious competitors to become the dominant religion of the Roman empire. He was also profoundly aware, as a citizen of the empire himself, that the character of that empire, its unity, its stability for much of its history, and its institutions had had a large part to play in the spread and ultimate triumph of his religion. This chapter is about the armies, which defended and policed the empire (and which had a part in Christian persecution), the emperors, who were both persecutors and, after Constantine, promoters of the Christian faith, and the administrators who ran a system that was, by modern standards, amateur yet surprisingly effective.

Although Rome ruled in practice through the consent of the governed, military force remained the ultimate deterrent. Nowhere was that more clearly shown than in the fate which befell what was, by imperial standards, an obscure city on the edge of empire – Jerusalem. For four years (66–70 CE), the Jewish people revolted from their Roman masters (Goodman 1987). In 70, the emperor's son, Titus, took the city of the apostles, and their fellow-Jews experienced the consequences of their disobedience:

The army having no victims either for slaughter or plunder, through lack of all objects on which to vent their rage, . . . Caesar ordered that the whole city and the temple be razed to the ground, leaving only the loftiest of the towers . . . All the rest of the wall encompassing the city was so completely levelled with

the ground as to leave future visitors to the spot no ground for believing it had ever been inhabited.

(Josephus, *JW* 7.1.1; Thackeray 1927 trans.: 505)

Rebel prisoners, too, suffered punishment that was both painful and public. At games held in honour of his brother Domitian's birthday, 2,500 Jewish captives were killed by wild beasts in the arena, burned alive or forced to fight to the death as gladiators for the entertainment of the public (Josephus, *JW* 7. 3. 1). Others, including the ring-leaders of the rebellion, were preserved to adorn the joint triumph of Vespasian and Titus at Rome in 71 CE (Figure 2.1).

Although revolts from the ruling power were rare, the exemplary case of Judaea was a reminder of the base on which Roman power ultimately rested: that of armed force and, if necessary, public terror. Although the bulk of the Roman world was at peace for the first two centuries CE and the visible presence of the armed forces was limited, apart from in the frontier areas, the military origins of the Roman state were never forgotten. Military vocabulary, such as the word *militia*, which meant both armed and administrative service, applied in both civil and military contexts. Even Plutarch (c. 45–c. 120), meditating on the histories of Greece and Rome in peaceful Chaeronea, was aware of the underlying realities of life under Roman rule: 'do not have great pride or confidence in your crown, for you see the soldier's boot just above your head' (*Precepts of Statecraft*, 17).



Figure 2.1 Coin depicting the 71 CE triumph of Vespasian celebrating the defeat of the Jews. Copyright the University of St Andrews.

THE ARMIES

Armies and empire

The bulk of the armed forces was stationed on the frontiers of the empire. In Europe, the main frontiers were the Rhine and the Danube. In the East the wide lands between Syria and the great Parthian empire, with their rich mix of cultures and peoples, formed a zone within which the two great powers struggled for dominance. To the south, much of Roman North Africa was bounded by sub-Saharan peoples, who posed no major threat to Roman dominion. Elsewhere in the empire smaller forces were stationed for garrison duty and to deal with small-scale local emergencies, but routine policing was the responsibility of city administrations.

Emperors were commanders-in-chief of the armed forces (Campbell 1983) and they determined policy. Under the Republic, military glory had been the main passport to political success and this convention applied also to emperors. Even the unwarlike Claudius, who unexpectedly became emperor in 41, accepted his military obligations with his launch of his conquest of Britain in 43. However, the Spanish-born Trajan (reigned 98–117), who rose through a military career to be adopted as his heir by Nerva, was the most spectacularly aggressive expander of the Roman empire since Augustus: two wars in Dacia (roughly modern Romania), which were to be commemorated in Trajan's Column at Rome (Figure 2.2), resulted in the annexation of that area as a new province in 106, and, at the time of his death in 117, he was seeking to expand the Roman empire eastwards beyond the Euphrates into Mesopotamia.

Trajan's successor, Hadrian (117–38) (Figure 2.3), however, signalled a change in policy and, with it, a change in the image of the emperor. Having abandoned Trajan's Eastern conquests, he engaged in no further expansion. However, he did travel more extensively in the Roman empire than had any of his predecessors, visiting armies en route and, we are told, participating in their austere lifestyle. Not surprisingly, the physical presence of the emperor spurred the locals into beneficial activities; Hadrian's Wall in Britain was the tangible consequence of the imperial presence in that remote corner of the Roman world. His example established that glory was no longer a prerequisite for success, a lesson well learned by his sedentary successor, Antoninus Pius (reigned 138–61), who hardly ever left Rome.

By the later second century, however, military involvement on the part of an emperor was no longer a matter only of his choice. Faced with serious military pressures on the Danube frontier, Marcus Aurelius (reigned 161–80), whose natural bent was for Stoic philosophy, felt obliged to spend long periods in camp (although his son and successor, Commodus (reigned 176–92), got away with a patched-up peace and a return to Rome). Further military activity in Britain (206–11) and against the Parthians took place under Septimius Severus (reigned 193–211) and his successors, with mixed success. In the 230s, however, a development with ominous implications for Rome occurred in Parthia, with the accession of the new, aggressive Sassanian dynasty in what now became, again, Persia. Pledged to renew the glories of the ancient empire of Cyrus the Great, the new Persian kings adopted a policy of active, albeit sporadic, hostility towards their Roman neighbours. For a further



Figure 2.2 Roman army from Trajan's column in Rome, showing emperor, standards and army. Photo J. C. N. Coulston.



Figure 2.3 Bust of Hadrian from the Thames. Copyright the British Museum.

century and more, the fortunes of war fluctuated. The Roman emperor Valerian was defeated and captured by Shapur I in 260. In 298, the tables were turned by the Caesar Galerius, who forced a humiliating treaty on the Persians. Late in his reign, the first Christian emperor, Constantine (306–37), sought to expand his empire (and its religion) yet further east, but died before achieving anything. Intermittent warfare and sieges persisted for much of the fourth century. Christians, however, took gleeful note of the spectacular failure of the invasion of Persia by the pagan emperor, Julian, an enterprise which resulted in his death in 363. For them, as for many non-Christians of the time, military glory was evidence of divine favour – and military disaster signified the reverse.

Emperors made by armies

The Roman armies were not only the tools of imperial expansion. They had also an occasional, but crucial, political role in the determination of the imperial succession. The support of the soldiers had been essential for the rise of Augustus and the establishment of the Principate. Tiberius, the first man to succeed to the position of emperor, was promptly reminded of his dependence on the soldiers when faced by mutinies of legions on the Rhine and Danube demanding improvements in their pay and working conditions. For emperors who succeeded at Rome, the support, or at least the acquiescence, of the elite corps, the Praetorian Guard, was essential. Gaius Caligula relied on Macro, commander of the Guard, in 37 (and disposed of him soon afterwards); Claudius was proclaimed by the Guard, in defiance of the Senate, in 41; and Nero counted on the Guard to favour him over Claudius' natural son, Britannicus, in 54. However, experience was to show that the power of the Praetorians was limited, in that they could not proclaim a candidate who lacked appeal to the armies of the frontiers. When they sought to impose their own man, Otho, on the empire in 69 they failed; Otho was overthrown by the armies of the north under Vitellius. A similar, and more notorious debacle occurred in 193, when the Praetorians, having murdered the previous emperor, put the empire up for auction between two rival candidates. The 'winner', that is the man who promised the highest donative, was to last a mere 66 days, before being overthrown, again by a northern army, this time under the ultimately successful pretender, Septimius Severus.

The events of the years 68–9, known as the 'Year of the Four Emperors', revealed, as Tacitus observed (*Histories* 1.4), that emperors could be made elsewhere than in Rome. It also revealed the potentially catastrophic effects for the whole empire of a disputed succession as the Roman legions of the Rhine under Vitellius, the Danube (under Antonius Primus, who declared for Vespasian) and of Syria became embroiled in a war of Roman against Roman. This costly experience was not to be repeated for over 120 years, although crisis did loom again in 96, after Domitian's assassination left a vacancy with no obvious heir. Disaster was averted by the Senate's nomination of the pacific Nerva and his subsequent, perhaps forced, adoption of Trajan. However, in 193, the death of Commodus without issue triggered a more prolonged period of civil war as Septimius Severus, governor of Pannonia, fought it out in the East with the governor of Syria (194–5) and in Britain (196–7). Septimius' position as a usurper had to be boosted with further military victories, hence

a successful attack on Parthia in 197–8. But he had also to do more to win and retain the favour of the legions: substantial increases in pay ensued, and the abolition of the anachronistic rules forbidding soldiers to marry. His son, Caracalla (211–17), took the militarization of the administration further, by adopting a soldier's lifestyle and gratuitously snubbing his non-military senatorial advisers.

The poorly documented third century was a period of imperial and military instability. Pressures on all the frontiers strained Roman military capabilities and rendered the job of emperor strenuous and, at times, untenable. The inability of successive emperors to impose themselves on the whole empire or establish stable dynasties allowed army candidates to bid for local or pan-imperial power virtually at will. From a distance, the picture seems one of chaos, with emperors managing reigns of, on average, less than two years. But this picture is misleading. Although emperors were frequent, they also came often from the same milieu, and formed, unofficially, a college of generals (Syme 1971: 194–200), whose combined efforts, from the 250s on, countered the military threats from the East and central Europe and prevented the threatened fragmentation of the whole imperial structure. Second, the enthusiasm of local armies for local, unauthorized generals should not be ascribed only, or even mainly, to self-serving irresponsibility on the part of the soldiers or the communities they were charged to defend. Irruptions of alien peoples across vulnerable frontiers put pressure on local leaders to find local emperors to give themselves the operational efficiency and boost to morale produced by having an emperor on the spot. Thus, for example, in 260, the Gallic armies proclaimed one Postumus as Augustus. His job was to defend the province, which had been neglected by 'central' emperors. So effective was he that his 'Gallic Empire' lasted, under himself and his successors, for 14 years, after which it was reintegrated into the Roman empire as a whole.

For much of the fourth century, emperors remained overtly military in character and the style of their rule. In 284, Diocletian inaugurated a period of comparative stability, but only through the public murder of a competitor; he and his colleagues campaigned regularly on the European frontiers and, with spectacular success, against Persia. Constantine, who was to be the first pro-Christian emperor, asserted his rights as his father's heir through his technically illegitimate proclamation by the army at York in 306. By 313, the college of emperors was reduced to two and, in 324, Constantine won control of the Eastern empire from his rival, Licinius, through civil war. Diocletian and Constantine together are credited with the establishment of two distinct types of army. Frontier forces, or *limitanei*, were settled more or less permanently on frontier lands to act as forward lines in the event of invasions. Alone, however, they could not be expected to contain a major threat. This was the job of the soldiers in the central striking force, the *comitatenses*, which had started to evolve by the mid-third century, and perhaps earlier. These were commanded by the emperor in person or a chief general, and could move swiftly to deal with crises. At the same time the civil administration was gradually separated from the military, with the creation of 'masters of the horse/foot', and of *duces* with military spheres of command often taking in more than one province.

The empire was defended not by one 'army' but by a number of regionally based armies, which did not always agree on a disputed succession. On the death of

Constantine in 337, the succession of his three surviving sons was assured by the massacre of rivals by the army in Constantinople. In 360, however, Julian, the so-called 'Apostate', who was the younger son of one of the murdered claimants, was himself proclaimed Augustus illegally by the Gallic army in Paris. After Julian's death in Persia in 363, the Eastern army in its turn successfully asserted its right of choice of emperor. Some attempts by regional forces to impose their candidate on the centre ended in failure. More serious were the challenges to central authority from Gaul and Britain: Magnentius, ruler of the West from 350, was suppressed after three years in 353; the Spanish-born Magnus Maximus survived as Augustus of Gaul, Spain and Britain for five years before his overthrow by Theodosius I in 388, and a plethora of usurpers from Britain added to the mayhem in the western empire in the first decade of the fifth century.

A soldier's life

Naturally, the rewards for soldiers were substantial. In the first century, the Roman citizenship was a desired proof of status, and Claudius (41–54) established a procedure of issuing diplomas to serving auxiliaries, confirming their citizenship and other privileges. Although they were not allowed legally to marry, soldiers (see Figure 2.4) whose units became settled in one area acquired unofficial households and children, whose inheritance could be safeguarded by special testamentary provisions. Given the uncertainties of a soldier's life, it also made sense to allow soldiers exemption from most legal formalities in the making of a will, although it was stipulated that oral requests had to be properly witnessed (*Digest* 29.1.24) and that an unwritten indication of intention was valid only if the soldier died while on service or within a year of his discharge (Ulpian, *Tituli* 23.10). Soldiers were outside – or above – civilian legal procedure. They had the right to have their cases heard by their own military courts, and civilians in dispute with soldiers were obliged to conform to military justice. Higher-ranking soldiers might also find themselves acting as solvers of disputes in the local community. On discharge, veterans were rewarded by the state with money or land. They could receive the right of *conubium*, which meant that their children, even by a non-citizen mother, would be Roman citizens. They were also immune from some taxes, and were not liable to be condemned to the mines, public works or wild beasts, punishments that could be inflicted on the lower classes, the *humiliores*. Perhaps most illustrative of the importance attached to glory and reputation was the emphasis placed on military decorations, such as the civic crown (*corona civica*), for being first over a defended wall. All this Titus realized after the fall of Jerusalem in 70:

Calling up each by name he applauded them as they came forward . . . He then placed crowns of gold upon their heads, presented them with gold neck-chains, little golden spears and standards made of silver and promoted each man to a higher rank; he further assigned to them out of the spoils silver and gold and raiments and other booty in abundance.

(Josephus, *JW* 7.1.3; Thackeray 1927 trans.: 509)

Despite all these forms of recognition of their importance, the life of a Roman soldier was often hard and always strenuous. Recruits were taught to march fast, at an average speed of 4 miles an hour (in summer) over five hours, rising to nearly 5 miles per hour with 'the fuller step' (Vegetius, 1.9). They were also trained to jump, climb, swim and carry a load of up to 60 pounds, as well as perform weapons drill. In 14 CE the insecurity of the new emperor Tiberius encouraged the armies of Pannonia and the Rhine to plead for better conditions:

old men, several of them with their bodies disfigured by wounds, were serving their thirtieth or fortieth year. There was no end to military service even when they were discharged, as they remained under the standards and performed the same tasks under another name. If any survived all these dangers, he was dragged off to a far away country, where he received a so-called plot of land that was in fact waterlogged marshes or uncultivated mountainsides. Indeed, military service was unremitting and unprofitable . . .

(Tacitus, *Annals* 1.17 = Campbell 1994: 20)

Soldiers who ran away, disobeyed orders, passed information to the enemy, or pretended to be ill to avoid having to fight could expect public torture and execution 'in full view of the soldiers, as an example' (Menander, *On Military Matters* III). The same fate awaited those who renounced their oath of allegiance. This category could include Christians, although it is not clear how far Christian recruits could have reconciled their principles over religious rites and sacrifices with the cultic observances required in army life. In 298, at Tingis in Mauretania, the Christian centurion Marcellus was executed with the sword for 'publicly renouncing his oath of allegiance and having, moreover, put on the record statements full of madness' (*Acts of Marcellus* 5; Musurillo 1972: 250–9). But, although the army was to be substantially Christianized in the course of the fourth century, few seem to have been put off the career by the Christian horror of shedding blood.

EMPERORS

The system of one-man rule over the whole Roman empire was created by Augustus (30 BCE–14 CE), after whom all subsequent emperors were named. Using concepts and terminology inherited and adapted from the Roman Republic, he established a position based both on military support and on the outcome of a concentration into his hands of the powers of traditional offices. The most important of these were the consulship, the consular *imperium* which enabled the emperor to retain through his legates command of the most militarized of the provinces, and the tribunate of the people, which allowed Augustus and his successors to depict themselves as acting with the authority of, or in place of, the sovereign people. By virtue of his *imperium*, the emperor had control of foreign policy; the use of divisive diplomacy to contain threats from outside the empire could be backed with armed force where necessary. As the soldiers' paymaster, the emperor also had overall charge of taxation – hence the (probably non-existent) census reported by Luke (2:1–3) decreed by Caesar Augustus, 'when Quirinus was governor of Syria'. In addition, the emperor derived



Figure 2.4 Fresco of a soldier in the Via Latina Catacomb in Rome, mid-fourth century CE.
Photo J. C. N. Coulston.

powers to patronize and bring relief to hard-pressed petitioners from his huge personal wealth, which tended to become confused with the public finances, despite the existence of separate treasuries.

Although much was to change in the style and manner in which imperial powers were exercised, their basic structure remained remarkably consistent. Thus, in the area of finance, emperors in the fourth and fifth centuries could still produce radical reform of the taxation system. Diocletian (284–305 CE), for example, regularized the assessment of taxation under the two headings of the *iugum*, based on land, or the produce of land, and the *caput*, based on living things, including animals as well as people, while still retaining an element of local flexibility, as revenue-raising systems in the Roman empire had always done. In the honour-oriented society of the Roman empire (see Chapter 1 this volume, and Lendon 1997), it is no surprise that military glory also remained a priority for fourth-century emperors, and the theme continued into the Byzantine empire. However, some of the more pacific emperors of the fifth century laid greater emphasis on Christian piety than war, preferring to achieve their victories (if any) through others.

The imperial image

Augustus' effectiveness derived in part from his appreciation of the constitutional sensibilities of both allies and opponents. Reassurance could be given to all constituencies by observance of Republican forms, and the continuing use of familiar terminologies of power. In 27 BCE Augustus had 'transferred the republic from my dominion to that of the Senate and People of Rome' (Augustus, *Res Gestae* 34.1; Brunt and Moore 1967 trans.: 35), and had received back the imperial provinces and other powers, ostensibly by free consent of the Senate; his immediate successors were accorded formal recognition by the Senate through a special statute defining their *imperium*. The notion prevalent in the first century that the Senate at Rome should, at least nominally, choose the emperor was still operative at Rome as late as 455, when the Senate chose one of its own number to replace a recently assassinated (and controversial) incumbent. Even the ethos of imperial power in Late antiquity retained something of its more populist Republican roots. Emperors who visited Rome to pay their respects to the symbolic capital of the world, as Constantius II did in 357, were expected to attend public entertainments and exchange pleasantries with the crowd:

and when he presented equestrian games, he enjoyed the witticisms of the plebs, who were neither arrogant nor did they fall short of their traditional freedom, while he too respectfully preserved the proper moderation.

(Ammianus Marcellinus, *History* 16.10.13; author's trans.)

Despite these Republican survivals, however, the outward show of the emperor changed beyond recognition between the first and the fourth centuries. Autocracy became more overt and the ceremonial persona of the emperor became more impressive but also more forbidding and remote. From Augustus onwards, Roman imperial art communicated an image of the world which placed the emperor and the state at the centre (Zanker 1988). The successors of Augustus responded in different ways to the pressures on them to conform to a quasi-divine image of imperial rule, which took its origins from the habit, well-established in Greek eastern cities, of offering cult to rulers, be they Hellenistic kings or Roman magistrates. Tiberius (14–37) was cautious, as was Claudius, but the short-lived and possibly mad Gaius Caligula (37–41) expected to be worshipped as a god, and castigated an unfortunate Jewish embassy for making offerings *for* him, rather than *to* him. The omnipresent imperial cult acted as a two-way means of communication – of loyalty from the subjects and of favour on the part of the emperor (Price 1984). Its repeated celebration was designed to foster a sense of unity throughout a highly diverse Roman world, and it was often skilfully embedded in existing cultic practices (Rives 1995).

The imperial cult and the increasingly overt exercise of autocratic rule by emperors also fostered an increasingly divine vocabulary combined with an ever more elaborate use of ceremonial. It was normal practice to greet a visiting dignitary with a formal welcoming ceremony – governors had even to be warned not to show boredom during the requisite oration by the local public orator (Ulpian, *On the Duties of a Governor*). By the late third century, the *adventus*, state arrival, of an

emperor was an occasion for ostentatious advertisement of his virtues (MacCormack 1972), even of his divinity:

Now . . . , when from each summit of the Alps, your deity first shone forth, a clearer light spread over all Italy; wonder seized upon all who gazed up . . . But when you came closer and closer and people began to recognise you, all the fields were filled . . . altars were ignited, incense placed upon them, libations of wine were poured, sacrificial victims slain . . . to the immortal gods praises and thanks were sung; they invoked not the god transmitted by conjecture but a visible and present Jupiter near at hand, they adored Hercules not as the stranger but as the emperor.

(*Latin panegyrics* XI.10.4–5; (Nixon and Rodgers 1994 trans.: 95)

However, even in these formal settings, communication between emperor and subject was two-way. Imperial panegyricists dutifully reflected the official propaganda line, but they also expected some return for their services. Similarly, the ceremony of *adoratio*, the kissing of the purple, instituted by Diocletian (284–305), although criticized at the time as evidence for oriental absolutism, enabled the emperor to show favour to a subject, as well as allowing the subject to pay homage to the emperor. In this curious fashion, the quasi-divine status of the emperor was fused with the more traditional notions of accessibility, which had characterized the Republican-style *princeps*.

Emperors and law

Traditional Republican structures shaped, and in some respects complicated, other processes. Imperial law-making, even in Late antiquity, reflected Republican legislative practices and precedents. Emperors, as magistrates, were entitled to issue edicts of general application. As supreme governors of provinces, they were also in a position to issue instructions (*mandata*) or letters (*epistulae*) to their deputies (Millar 1977: 314–21). As many of these imperial pronouncements were responses to legal queries, they were also known as *rescripta*, replies, or *subscripta*, notes at the foot of a document. Third-century jurists rationalized the fact of imperial legislative power by describing the emperor's enactments as having 'the force of law', because he acted on the sovereign people's behalf. By the early fourth century, edicts and *epistulae*, along with rescripts, had become the main source of imperial law, but problems over both the status (whether of general application or not) and the provenance (by possibly corrupt means) of rescripts led to their sidelining by the early fifth century. Instead, emperors and their administrators tried to impose order on the system by resorting to more refined concepts of 'edictal' or 'general laws'. In 438, Theodosius II issued his attempt at a general codification of imperial law, the Theodosian Code, which included, in Book 16, a collection of imperial laws issued by emperors from Constantine onwards on a subject which had never before been formally recognized as a distinct category of law – Christianity.

The fact that so much binding imperial regulation was issued on an *ad hoc* basis, in reply to questions, plus the absence of organized archives, meant that the precise law on any matter at any particular time could be hard to ascertain. This habitual

state of confusion may partly explain why persecution of Christians was accepted by Pliny, in c. 112, and his imperial boss, Trajan, as legal fact, although Pliny does not seem to have known why this was the case.

It was clear, however, to both Trajan and, later, Hadrian that an accused Christian was entitled to the same legal safeguards as was anyone else in the Roman empire. Denunciations were to be acted on, but Christians were not to be hounded by the authorities; if those denounced sacrificed, they were to be let off, as they clearly were not Christians (who, by definition, would refuse to sacrifice); and anonymous denunciations were prohibited (Pliny, *Letters* 10.96–7; Hadrian's rescript to Minucius Fundanus, cited Justin, *Apologia* 1.69 and Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.9). Although the safeguards were not always operated in practice, their existence is an important reminder of the emperor's role as the ultimate guardian of law and order.

In Late antiquity, Christian emperors, who in general acted as patrons of the church, giving both material goods and administrative support, also acquired a new role as active legislators on 'right religion'. Whereas pagan emperors before Constantine had tolerated most religions, provided they avoided atheism, treason or other forms of criminal activity such as human sacrifice (all charges made against Christians), Constantine and his successors found themselves under increasing pressure to legislate on behalf of Christianity and against religious competitors. In the course of the fourth century, subsidies for public pagan cults were removed, sacrifices were outlawed, some temples were closed and, by the end of the century, practising pagans were (in theory) debarred from high office. At the same time, 'right religion' was defined by Theodosius I (reigned 379–95) in terms of the views held by named prominent churchmen:

It is our will that all the peoples who are ruled by the administration of Our Clemency shall practise that religion which the divine Peter the Apostle transmitted to the Romans, as the religion which he introduced makes clear even unto this day. It is evident that this is the religion that is followed by the Pontiff Damasus (Bishop of Rome AD 367–384)) and by Peter, Bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic sanctity . . .

(1) We command that those persons who follow this rule shall embrace the name of Catholic Christians. The rest, however, whom we adjudge demented and insane, shall sustain the infamy of heretical dogmas, their meeting places shall not receive the name of churches and they shall be smitten first by divine vengeance and secondly by the retribution of our own initiative.

(*Theodosian Code* 16.2.1: Pharr 1952 trans.)

This was reinforced by savage laws, issued against heretics, such as the Manichaeans, the Macedonians and the Eunomians, whose meetings were forbidden and who were made subject to various legal disabilities. These enactments did not stop sacrifices or prevent continued activity by heretics, but they signalled the emperor's opinions to the empire at large and could be cited by Christians prepared to go on the offensive on their own account.

Law and the citizen

In the first century, however, not every inhabitant of the empire was subject to, or protected by, the safeguards of Roman law. Roman citizenship was a much-prized privilege, which could be allocated to communities through various block grants as a recognition of Roman-ness or an acknowledgement of service. Vespasian's award, for example, to the cities of Baetica of the Latin right, granted citizenship to city magistrates and their families, in an area which had long been subject to Roman influence and which was to produce two emperors, Trajan (98–117) (Figure 2.5) and his successor Hadrian (died 138). It could also be granted to individuals who had served the empire or emperor well; once gained, it was inherited by the children, whose names might also be included in the registration of the grant. Both forms of award were represented as exercises in imperial patronage. This focused gratitude on the emperor (often expressed through inscriptions) but was also a delicate reminder of the discretionary element in the whole procedure. Although there were tacit criteria, which should normally have been observed, the emperor could say 'no' if he felt like it.

Roman citizens were subject to Roman law, and could resort to Roman legal procedures in the resolution of disputes, even, sometimes, with non-citizens. The Spanish city constitutions generated by Vespasian's grant of Latin right stipulated that, when not otherwise provided for, the *municipes* 'are to deal with each other in all



Figure 2.5 Bust of Trajan from Ephesus. Photo J. C. N. Coulston.

these matters under the civil law under which Roman citizens deal or will deal with each other', even though not all the inhabitants of the cities were Roman citizens (*Law of Irmi*, ch. 93 in Gonzalez 1986: 198–9). Every rule had its exceptions however and, in some cases, it was inconvenient for a new citizen to be exempted from local usages; thus, under Marcus Aurelius, one Julianus of the North African Zegrenses was granted citizenship along with his children, 'with the laws of their people remaining intact' (Sherwin White 1973: 86).

Julianus' case illustrates that identity was not to be defined by citizenship alone. Most famous among Christian examples of this was Paul of Tarsus, who, on his arrival at Jerusalem, found himself affirming a multicultural identity. Having been seized by a mob, he had to be rescued by the soldiers. The guard commander mistook him for an 'Egyptian' terrorist and asked him if he spoke Greek. Paul replied that he was a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen, he observed patriotically, of no mean city. He was then allowed to address the crowd and did so, affirming his Jewish identity, in Aramaic; 'I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel, I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers . . . ' (Acts 22:3). His speech failed to win over the mob and the soldiers prepared to flog Paul to find out more. At this point Paul's identity as a Roman citizen, who was exempt from flogging without trial, quickly surfaced, much to the embarrassment of his captors (22:25–9) and he was removed to be tried before Felix, the governor (23:23–35). After a long delay in prison, Paul was brought before Felix' successor, Festus, from whose jurisdiction he appealed, as was his right as a Roman citizen, to the emperor.

Confining certain legal privileges to a small elite of citizens worked, while the elite remained small. However, as the Roman citizenship expanded it became less of a privilege or a recognition of existing status. New procedures evolved to deal with the expanded numbers and, in the second century, two new legal categories of person evolved, the 'more honorable' *honestiores* and the 'more humble' *humiliores* (Garney 1970); the latter were subject to worse and more humiliating punishments than the former, the dignity of whose status was preserved even when convicted of crimes carrying the death penalty – they could simply be beheaded, while the lower classes were liable to crucifixion, burning alive and being publicly devoured by wild beasts. This two-tier system underlay the type of punishment that some Christian martyrs endured: Polycarp of Smyrna, for example, was burned alive in the arena in 155, while the martyrs of Lyon in 177 and of Carthage in 203 faced wild boars, bears and other animals in the arena.

In 212, the emperor Caracalla granted citizenship to all the free people of the empire, including Christians, many of whom would have been citizens already. This removed numerous anomalies at a stroke but left the imperial government with a new problem: the numbers of citizens with the right of appeal to the emperor. Over the next two centuries a more complex and multi-tiered system of justice and appeals evolved. The courts of first resort were those of the provincial governors, who were given smaller areas to look after, while the emperor's role as the final judge was delegated, at least in part, to new super-provincial officials, the praetorian prefects, who evolved in the first part of the fourth century. But the emperors could never become entirely disengaged from the judicial process and remained the court

of last resort whenever unprecedented, intricate or politically sensitive matters were at stake.

In a separate development, episcopal jurisdiction achieved official recognition under Constantine and his successors. Within Christian communities, bishops had long been accepted as arbiters of disputes and were entitled to hold hearings to decide matters between members of the faithful. In theory, the idea was not to impose a solution but to act as a mediator and reconcile the disputants. When Constantine sought to make episcopal jurisdiction binding on both Christians and anyone else hauled by a Christian into an episcopal court, he ran the risk of subverting the principle of consent on which much episcopal authority in the settling of disputes was based. For this reason, the evolution of episcopal justice in the fourth century was more hesitant than the laws imply and by the early fifth century, while the principle of bishops' hearings was well established, it was also conceded that bishops might behave as arbiters, persuading to a settlement, as well as as judges, with the right to impose their will. Although all this was established by imperial fiat, episcopal jurisdiction remained outside the official lay structures: the two main benefits for episcopal 'judges' were the moral backing provided by imperial authority and the right to appeal to the lay authorities for enforcement of their decisions, as or when required.

BUREAUCRATS

The Christian polemicist, Lactantius, writing in the early fourth century CE, complained of Diocletian that the creation of the Tetrarchy (rule by four emperors), which occurred in 293 CE (see Leadbetter, Chapter 10, this volume), gave rise to a military and administrative machine that ruined the state (*On the Deaths of the Persecutors* 7.3–4). Provinces established in the first century CE and adapted in minor ways since, were split into smaller administrative units, roughly doubling the number of governors and their staffs. These governors (*praesides*, *consulares*, *proconsuls*) were supervised by deputies (*vicarii*), who also had staffs and were themselves subject to super-governors, the praetorian prefects, whose number stabilized at four under Constantine. Co-existing with this system, which was largely designed for civil administration, was a military structure, designed to cope with defence and security requirements on a regional rather than a strictly provincial basis; thus, for example, the defence of the Channel coasts, in the provinces of Britain and Gaul, was in the hands of a single military official, the Count of the Saxon Shore.

Lactantius, who regarded Diocletian as 'an author of crimes and an inventor of evils' because he persecuted Christians, blamed on him the corrupt and complex system of bureaucratic government, which characterized the later Roman empire from the early fourth century onwards. But his hero, Constantine, was no less responsible for increasing the number of those involved in government. Under him a burgeoning palace administration helped to centralize the main functions of government on an increasingly intricate court bureaucracy. These included finance (i.e. taxation and the administration of the imperial estates), which was run by two officials, the so-called Count of the Sacred Largesses (*comes sacrarum largitionum*) and

the Count of the Private Estates (*comes rerum privatarum*); justice, including both criminal justice and dispute settlement; and communication with the empire at large, through formal dispatches, drafted by the secretariat; and imperial laws, decided, by the fifth century, by the emperor's council, the consistory, and framed by the imperial quaestor. The administrative picture was further complicated by the rise of the second imperial capital, Constantinople. Founded by Constantine in 330 as a lesser 'New Rome' (the senators were 'distinguished', *clari*, but not *very* distinguished, *clarissimi*, as they were at Rome), Constantinople evolved in the fourth century as a serious second capital with its own self-confident bureaucracy, composed of members of the Eastern elite drawn from the cities of the East. By the early fifth century, this second administration could act independently of the West and was to carry forward the Roman heritage into the Byzantine empire.

However, *pace* Lactantius, the numbers involved in late Roman administration, although large by comparison with early centuries, were tiny compared with the bureaucracies of the late twentieth century. It has been calculated that there were some 3,000 'very good jobs' (Heather 1994; see also Jones 1964: 572–96) in each half of the empire, East and West, by *c.* 400 CE, of which around 2,700 belonged to the central palatine *officia*. In addition, provincial governors' staffs supplied in the region of 10,000 jobs. All this took no account of unpaid supernumeraries on the waiting lists, nor do the figures take account of the turnover. Holders of high office might serve for little more than a year, while the middle-ranking bureaucrat might be signed up for a period of 15 or 20 years. So the number involved in the administration per generation was considerably greater than the number of posts available.

However, although the structure of the administration had changed radically from the early empire, what was more significant was the evolution of a bureaucratic culture of government. Defined by rules rather than genuinely (or chaotically) creative, late Roman government was excessively concerned with hierarchies, departmental 'empires', and lines of demarcation between jobs and offices – a concern which is strikingly recorded in the late Roman Civil and Military Service List, the *Notitia Dignitatum*. Both within the palace and in society at large, the importance of correct record-keeping was enhanced: a new archive was perhaps created near the Hippodrome at Constantinople in the mid-fourth century (Kelly 1994). In general, matters once accepted on trust, such as a widowed mother's intention not to remarry, or the outcome of arbitration hearings, were dutifully recorded and witnessed.

From *domus* to *palatium*

The bureaucracy of the late empire was a long way from the system established by Augustus and based, as so often, on Republican precedent. Under the Republic, Rome and the provinces were run by magistrates using methods similar to those used in regulating their own households. Governors and other magistrates, like fathers of families, relied on an advisory council, *consilium*, of friends and family. Following this practice, Augustus established a similar advisory council, consisting largely of senior senators (Crook 1955). His successors followed his lead, but the composition of the council changed over time and, by the third century, had become

more overtly military, with precedence being given to the praetorian prefects in preference to senators. Like everything else, the *consilium* was formalized in the fourth century. It consisted of various heads of civil service departments, provincial supremos and generals, and was renamed the consistory. However, it was still possible for the emperor to have special advisers, whose status was advertised through their designation as *comites consistoriani*, and discussion could be spirited and frank (Matthews 1989).

Republican notables also expected to run their households and, specifically, their correspondence with the help of their *familia*, which meant both family and household. Cicero, for example, relied on his freedman, Tiro, as a secretary and organizer of his letters, and, prior to his divorce, on his wife Terentia for part of the administration of his affairs. Early emperors also relied heavily on family, retainers and friends, not always to their advantage. Claudius (reigned 41–54) was widely held to have been excessively influenced by his various wives and freedmen, who exploited his absent-mindedness and poor eyesight to their own advantage. However, such households did not always function harmoniously together. When Claudius' third wife, Messalina, left him for the consul of the year (48), it was his freedman, Narcissus, who uncovered the attempt and ensured it was decisively dealt with. He then went on to compete, unsuccessfully, with two other freedmen for the honour of selecting Claudius' fourth wife, the assertive Agrippina. The backer of the successful candidate, Pallas, went on to become a multi-millionaire and to be honoured with praetorian insignia – to the fury of some – by the Roman Senate (Pliny, *Letters* 7.29 and 8.6). The companionship of some household members could even prove fatal: Agrippina was credited with poisoning Claudius with a dish of mushrooms, and imperial concubines were implicated in the assassinations of Domitian in 96 and of Commodus in 192.

Imperial reliance on freedmen and household government proved deeply unpopular for other reasons. The Roman Senate, although packed with supporters and clients of emperors, and increasingly consisting of new men from outside Rome and even Italy, retained a collective sense of its historical identity as the ruling council of the empire, and expected to share in the duties and rewards of its government. Ancient pride, however, could find itself in conflict with the servile tendencies of the place-seeker. Thus the honours voted by a sycophantic Senate to Pallas under Claudius made Pliny, as he viewed the inscription and decree many decades later, deeply ashamed:

I say nothing of this offer of the praetorian insignia to a slave, for they were slaves themselves who made the offer, nothing of the resolution that he should not only be begged but even compelled to wear a gold ring . . .; these are trivial details, which may well be set aside. This is what must stand on record; . . . on behalf of Pallas, the Senate thanked the Emperor for his own recognition of the man in bestowing high honour, and for giving them the opportunity of testifying their appreciation.

(Pliny, *Letters* 8.6; Radice 1963 trans.: 214)

Servile or not, the Senate of the first and second centuries provided governors for the provinces and generals for the armies. Certain areas of the empire, notably Asia

Minor, Africa and Italy (which was not treated as a province before the third century), became and remained senatorial preserves. But although governors were supreme in their spheres, while they were in office, tenure of the post was not as easy as it appeared. The governor's duties were straightforward. He was the supreme judge within the province (although minor jurisdiction was delegated to the cities) and had 'the right of the sword' and a duty to ensure that justice was properly administered, the weak protected, and that the rich and powerful did not gain unfair advantages. He had vaguely defined financial responsibilities, especially when cities failed to keep their budgets under control. He might well have military duties, especially in difficult frontier areas like Britain. His problem, potentially, was that he would, in the course of carrying out his duties, offend powerful vested interests in his province, who might launch a prosecution after his departure from office. Sometimes such prosecutions, such as that of Marius Priscus, governor of Africa in 100 CE (Pliny, *Letters* 2.11), were justified. On other occasions, however, private grudges may be suspected. One governor of Bithynia, defended by Pliny, was initially charged by 'the province', then a second delegation arrived, insisting that they represented 'the province' and that the charges should be withdrawn (Pliny, *Letters* 7.6 and 7.10).

The real prospect of prosecution encouraged governors to take precautions. They were advised to be tactful, but to avoid becoming too close to any of the locals; this should be contrasted with the provincials' propensity to claim close friendship with governors and even emperors. They were also forbidden by law to take 'gifts', because they could be construed as bribes. Prudent governors like Pliny kept a strict record of their decisions. Pliny also referred anything possibly outside his sphere or potentially controversial to the emperor, in part to ensure that he could not be appealed against later. Court records also contained summaries of the proceedings in every trial, thus allowing a governor or other judge to be detected in abuses of procedure. Such records underlie the accounts of some martyrdoms, for example those of Scillium in North Africa in 180 CE. The format was ideal for the 'bearing of witness' before the governor, and the official status of the court record lent further veracity – and thus authority – to the 'witness' of Christians who declared "Christianus sum" in open court and suffered for their faith.

Because of the political sensitivity of the position, and its potential for abuse, allegations of corruption against governors and their staffs were frequent. In the rhetoric of late Roman legislation, which made much of its concern for the accountability of officials, the corruption of governors was taken as almost axiomatic. Yet, despite the fuss made, convictions for corruption were relatively rare. This may have been due to the efficiency of the Roman establishment in protecting its own, but there may also have been a problem of establishing the truth of allegations coming from doubtful or prejudiced sources. But, in the course of the second and third centuries, senatorial control of most provinces was replaced by the appointment of *equites*, men of wealth and standing outside the Senate, who took increasing advantage of the opportunities offered by a job in government. The military instability of the third century, and the requirement that emperors attend to the needs of the frontiers, finally removed the centre of power from the city of Rome and thus effectively sidelined the Senate. New imperial capitals grew up in favoured cities

such as Sirmium on the Save, a tributary of the Danube, Trier, on the Moselle, Nicomedia in Bithynia, favoured by Diocletian, and the ultimate new imperial creation, Constantinople, dedicated by Constantine in 330.

The Senate at Rome, however, remained a formidable assembly which could not be ignored. As Roman citizenship spread, so the membership of the Senate expanded in the first and second centuries to take in provincials from much of the empire. Even when its activities seemed largely peripheral to the real needs of the empire in the third century, the Senate was saved from obscurity by the accumulated landed wealth and patronage of its membership and the prestige of its antiquity. In the early fourth century, Constantine revolutionized the senatorial order by granting senatorial rank to holders of office in the imperial administration. At the same time, he may also have removed the requirement that senators be resident at or near Rome. The long-term effect of this was to give provincial office-holders a 'senatorial' identity and status, while also creating a distinction in practice between holders of senatorial rank in the provinces or at court and the 'Romans of Rome' (although the two could and did overlap). In the late fourth century, the Roman Senate became more politically self-assertive. Senators of Rome occupied the Prefecture of the City and key governorships in Italy and Africa, while ties with the imperial court also improved (Matthews 1975). Despite the adherence of most emperors to Christianity, a powerful group of pagan senators persisted in the active promotion of pagan rites and values; the state paper of Symmachus requesting the restoration to the Senate of the Altar of Victory in 384 was taken as a definitive manifesto of the pagan cause (Croke and Harries 1983). In the fifth century, as the power of the western emperor waned and the Germanic kingdoms of Gaul, Spain and Africa expanded, the Senate at Rome retained a confident separate identity, even creating an emperor again, from its number, briefly, in 455.

As Senate and emperor increasingly went their separate ways, the administration centred on the emperor himself became more formalized. New recruits for new posts were drawn from the non-political wealthy of the empire, the *equites*, many of whom would have been related to senators anyway. Unlike senators, these cannot be described as a class with any distinctive political identity or agenda of their own. *Equites* were attractive imperial servants because their wealth, education and social status, in conjunction with their complete dependence on the emperor's patronage, made them both loyal (as a rule) and socially acceptable to the elites in the empire as a whole with whom they had to deal. By the second century, *equites* were established in all the main branches of government. In finance, equestrian procurators ran the imperial estates, which included other commercial ventures, such as mining, all over the provinces, and governors were advised to keep out of their way. Imperial wealth was enhanced by periodic confiscations of property from traitors, rebels and other criminals condemned on capital charges, notably by Septimius Severus after the Civil Wars of 193–7, as well as by taxation receipts.

It might be thought that sophisticated professional administrative qualifications would be required to run so large an enterprise as the Roman empire. Although areas of expertise can be detected in the case of many prominent office-holders – Pliny, for example, did understand money, and those who answered petitions in the office *a libellis* had to know what the law was – the nature of Roman imperial

administration was, by modern standards, amateurish in the extreme. What was required of many imperial servants, especially those involved with the communication of the imperial will, was that they had a good grasp of the rhetorical conventions used by the elite in conversing with itself and its public throughout the empire. In the imperial secretariats, educated *equites* wrote the emperor's correspondence in Latin and, if appropriate, Greek. Their level of rhetorical education was therefore crucial to the effectiveness of the emperor himself. His use of right language proved him a true member of the Roman elite (even when, as a product of the ranks, he clearly was not). Under the later empire, when emperors could resort to the massacre of thousands to reassert their authority and suppress dissent, the use of elite language was an essential reassurance to the ruling classes on whose acquiescence the empire depended (Brown 1992). Sharers of a common culture could not be expected to turn too savagely on each other.

Under the early empire, the emperors were expected, conventionally, to use their own words. How far they actually relied on speechwriters down to the fourth century is unclear as such reliance would never be admitted. By the time of Constantine, however, imperial spokesmen had come to take a more prominent role. What the emperor said consisted not only of policy statements to the Senate or other interested groups, but also edicts, letters of general import and 'general laws' which, by the late fourth century, were drafted by the imperial quaestor. He, uniquely, had no office staff of his own and was responsible, technically, for the laws' style rather than their content. However, in the more professionalized environment of fifth-century Constantinople, the quaestor was expected to be a legal expert as well as gifted with the eloquence that was the mark of the true aristocrat. His emergence marks off, symbolically, the new world of the professional bureaucrat from the old and less formal administrative structures supported by the gifted (or well-connected) amateur.

The size of the state

As the Roman empire evolved through conquest and diplomacy, diversity was accommodated and encouraged. Provided the state's limited objectives of collecting taxes, fighting wars, and administering justice where appropriate were met, local systems were left largely intact. Much power remained, therefore, where it had been prior to incorporation into the Roman empire – with the provincial periphery, rather than the Roman centre. Cities used to centuries of autonomy still ran their internal affairs and jealously guarded their traditional privileges; on the Inscriptions Wall at Aphrodisias in Caria, for example, documents were preserved asserting the city's free status and immunity from, *inter alia*, the tax on nails (Reynolds 1982, document 15). Although cities were governed by local councils, consisting of the wealthy and reputable, who accepted their duty to hold magistracies and carry out public duties on some kind of a rota basis, much was left to private initiative. Within communities, local elites competed energetically with each other for offices, and the prestige that went with them, and the leaders of cities vied with their peers in neighbouring towns in the erection of beautiful buildings and the provision of fresh amenities for their pampered citizens. These monumental undertakings

entailed often huge expense, but it was more than compensated for, in the eyes of the benefactor, by the status that accrued to the successful patron and the honours that would be offered to him (or her) by his (or her) grateful fellow citizens (London 1997).

In private dealings, the role of the state was similarly restricted. Apart from limited *alimenta* schemes, established by both emperors and private patrons for the rearing of some children at state expense, and concern on the part of some city councils for their corn supply, the state took no responsibility for the economic welfare of families, the orphaned, the widowed, or the old; there were no pensions or social security. Education and healthcare were not publicly funded, although there were rules about how many teachers of rhetoric (at secondary level), doctors or philosophers could be granted privileges because of the importance of the work they did. Prior to Augustus, the state also took little interest in private morality; adultery, for example, was punishable by the family concerned, not the state.

Under the empire, the role of the state expanded, more powers were drawn to the centre and the private space available to the citizen contracted. This was in part due to the ambition of emperors and administrators to control: Hadrian, for example, took extensive new legal powers when he arrogated to himself the sole right to modify the codified Praetorian Edict of civil law in c. 130. It was also the inevitable consequence of the expansion of the Roman citizen body; as other jurisdictions faded into obsolescence, a correspondingly greater burden fell on the Roman courts and thus also on the emperor, as the supreme judge, and his staff.

Moreover, as time went on, the state found it harder to carry out its limited objectives, and therefore took powers to itself to enable it to carry out its function. Difficulties arose in the relationship of centre to periphery due to wider social changes which affected the city councils, the backbone of the imperial system. New social strata evolved above the heads of the decurion, or local councillor. Ambitious men with money or connections moved upwards into those strata, leaving their less wealthy colleagues to foot the bill for local services. Local council duties became more onerous and less prestigious and more people left. Economic changes for the worse in some areas also exacerbated the hardships of decurions who remained at their posts. Concerned for its revenues, the central government increasingly intervened to prevent the flight from the councils and, by the mid-fourth century, took over an increasing amount of the council's revenues and responsibilities (Liebeschuetz 1972). Such interventions were, however, of limited use. Successful migrants from the councils used patrons to escape detection, and emperors themselves would have known that their expanding administrations profited from the talents of the curial fugitives. Part of the running of cities, however, was taken over by local bishops, whose coffers, filled as they were with the charity of the pious and wealthy, financed not only churches but also some of the public services, such as a water supply, hitherto the duty of the council.

Much of the responsibility for the increased centralization of the Roman system rested with the subjects themselves. Pliny's letters from the wealthy and normally peaceful province of Bithynia from 110 to 113 show an intensely competitive agglomerate of cities, where expenditure had got out of control, corruption was suspected and records of important transactions had conveniently gone missing. His

own special status was significant for the future; he had been sent in as an imperial troubleshooter, with special powers to intervene in the cities' financial affairs. Where problems were confined to a smaller area, another solution was to appoint a *curator*, who was to deal with the locals but be accountable to the centre. Sometimes even a *curator* was unable to sort things out; Aphrodisias, in the late second century, is found appealing to the provincial governor of Asia to intervene to ensure that the *curator's* arrangements, which had failed so far, were adhered to (Reynolds 1982: document 16). Such appeals, from subjects in distress, cannot have been unusual, and could be advantageous in the short term, as the emperor was expected to act as an effective but beneficent patron. But the inevitable, if not always obvious, consequence of inviting central intervention was to expand the power of the centre at the expense of local self-determination.

In parallel with this, the state took a closer interest in citizens as individuals. More offences were created in law – and thus more remedies. More crimes became assimilated to that of treason, a development which restricted the civil liberties, and particularly freedom from torture, of those accused. Public punishment and torture asserted the state's control over the body of the criminal. But, as Foucault argued (1977), an ideology of control provokes its opposite in a counter-culture of rebellion or subversive discourse. Jewish writers such as the author of 2 Baruch (c. 100 CE) developed a counter-discourse to the sack of Jerusalem in 70 CE and the *Judaea Capta* coins which celebrated it (Esler 1995). Later, we see this literature of protest take shape in the martyr acts, in which Christians are shown defying the efforts of the state to control their bodies in prison, through chains, through interrogation and, ultimately, through death.

The precedent of Augustus' criminalization of adultery, which removed the offence from the jurisdiction of the family to that of the state, encouraged emperors further to interfere in the private lives and beliefs of the citizen. The stridently moralistic tone of late Roman legislation, pagan and Christian, reflects the emperor's perceived right to impose his morality on the empire as a whole, through the force of law if necessary. Diocletian's denunciation of incest in 295 (children of such couples were illegitimate) and Constantine's extensive legislation on celibates (whose testamentary restrictions, imposed by Augustus, were removed), adultery and divorce added up to a formidable programme of interference in marriage and the family (Evans Grubbs 1995). Because of their moral mission, emperors' right to legislate extended from action to belief. Emperors who persecuted Christians would have justified their actions on grounds of the state's needs; the *pax deorum* was threatened by recalcitrants who refused to sacrifice to the gods. Christians however claimed the right to abide by their personal beliefs without penalty. In the fourth century, the roles were reversed, and the requirements of Christian religious concord were invoked against heretics, pagans and others, who became liable to legal disabilities (or worse) if they persisted. It was not enough for the state to control the body; it also sought to direct the soul.

Imperial women

No woman could hold imperial office, command an army or pass a law. Nor was it acceptable that she attend councils of state. This limited the amount of direct power that women could wield in the imperial system. Nevertheless, there were widespread, and to some extent justified, perceptions that the power of imperial women was for real. The Julio-Claudian dynasty, down to 68, was in fact created by a line of succession that ran from Augustus from mother to daughter. Not surprisingly, it was characterized by a series of formidable females, notably the granddaughter and great-granddaughter of Augustus, both called Agrippina, who schemed for the succession of their sons, with mixed success. Thereafter, women of the imperial house often received high-profile treatment. Trajan's wife, Plotina, was believed to have engineered the succession for her favourite, Hadrian, whose title was disputed. At the end of the second century, Septimius Severus gave lavish public honours to his Syrian wife, Julia Domna, the 'mother of the camp'. From 211 onwards Julia retained power and influence through her son, Caracalla, who, unusually, allowed her to answer petitions on his behalf; the Severan dynasty thereafter was perpetuated through women down to 235. In Late antiquity, the womenfolk of emperors were a mixed blessing. Constantine's wife, Fausta, was executed for faults unknown in 326, along with his eldest son, but his mother, Helena, was a prominent patron of Christianity. In the late fourth century, the influence of Christian empresses became more prominent. Valentinian II's mother Justina posed a dangerous challenge to Ambrose of Milan, because she was both empress and Arian. In Constantinople, Eudoxia, the empress of Arcadius (395–408), feuded bitterly with the bishop, John Chrysostom, and her daughters, headed by the ostentatiously virginal Pulcheria, gave to the court of their little brother, Theodosius II, a perhaps oppressively devout 'monastic' quality. The struggle for influence between Pulcheria and Theodosius' cultivated wife, Aelia Eudocia, was to culminate in 440 with the departure of both parties from public life; the latter's journey to Jerusalem, however, had important implications for the resurrected holy city.

Empresses attracted attention. Did they have real power? Their family, their clients and their detractors were equally fervent in their assertions that they did. Emperors did not exist or rule in isolation. Their strength was enhanced by the support of a visible family and, preferably, an assured succession, and the message that the empire was headed by a family was reinforced through the imperial cult, which celebrated previous emperors and current empresses, as well as the emperor himself. Clients also had axes to grind. Certainly empresses were effective patrons. They were rich, they could donate buildings and valuables to favoured cities (or bishops), they had clients of their own, they had connections and privileged access to the supreme ruler. Perceptions of empresses, especially in the Eastern part of the empire, as having independent power were conditioned by honours paid to Hellenistic queens, although they may not always have reflected domestic political reality. The powers of empresses to help clients was, therefore, genuine, but, not unnaturally, clients would stress the importance of their patron in their own interests as well as hers. Detractors would be equally prone to exaggerate; their point, all too often, was that the power of women was bad in itself and must be controlled.

The result of this combination of real power and literary exaggerations is that, whenever the emperor appeared weak or lacking in dynamic ideas or policies of his own, assertions of petticoat government abound. Their truth, however, is another matter. The limitations on what they could do directly have been noted above and would seriously have limited their power to affect the workings of government directly (*contra* Holum 1983). Where emperors showed themselves to be weak, we should look to the male office-holders, who were in a position to exert real, albeit perhaps discreet, control of the empire and its resources, not to the politics of the boudoir.

The new Jerusalem

Imperial patronage of cities, and the impact of imperial sponsorship of a favoured religion, and of imperial women patrons on the changing landscape of the Christian empire are well illustrated in the fate of Jerusalem in Late antiquity. Under the early empire, the Temple had been destroyed and the population of Jerusalem expelled. Hadrian had proceeded to refound the city as the Roman colony of Aelia Capitolina, presided over by the twin deities, Jupiter Capitolinus and the emperor himself, Aelius Hadrianus. But memories based on Jewish national identity, religion and history could not be so easily destroyed. Nor did Christians surrender their holy city, but continued to meet unobtrusively outside the new city walls.

Constantine's victory over his rival Licinius in 325 at last gave the first Christian emperor control of the holy places. The bishop of Jerusalem was quick to exploit the opportunities offered by imperial patronage. Beneath Hadrian's Temple to Venus was unearthed the Holy Sepulchre itself; under Constantine's active guidance the site was renovated and a new Golgotha basilica constructed. Two other sites, the caves of the Nativity at Bethlehem and the Mount of Olives, also received churches, financed by Constantine, in association with his mother, Helena. Immediately all became foci for pilgrimage – and a doubtlessly lucrative tourist industry.

Among the pilgrims were two empresses. Helena journeyed through the East in the late 320s, the aftermath of the dynastic crisis which led to the deaths of Constantine's wife and son. Her progress in the full magnificence of royalty was designed to make an impact, as imperial 'presences' usually did, and new churches and endowments were the predictable result. Soon after her pilgrimage, alleged relics of the True Cross were available in Jerusalem, and their discovery quickly, but fallaciously, became linked to Helena's sojourn at Jerusalem (Hunt 1982: 38–48).

In the footsteps of this legend, another empress, Eudocia, also journeyed to the Holy Land in 438, extending pre-existing court patronage by further activity generated by her personal presence (see Chapter 18 in this volume). In the early 440s she retired to reside in Jerusalem, where she was to remain for some 20 years. Like Helena, Eudocia turned to the Holy Land following a dynastic upheaval (although Eudocia, unlike Helena, was also a casualty) and like her model she built churches, adding to them monasteries and hostels; she is also credited with the enlargement of the city to the south to take in Mount Sion (Hunt 1982: 238). Her personal piety had the added dimension of a holy mentor; the Roman aristocrat Melania the Younger had acted as her spiritual guide.

CONCLUSION

Although the physical landscape of the empire changed as a result of the coming of Christianity, its institutions had evolved largely independently of religious concerns. The building-block of empire remained the city and emperors devoted themselves to the maintenance of city administrations against the centripetal forces that progressively undermined local independence. Yet, paradoxically, it was the need on the part of emperors themselves for talented administrators in an ever-expanding bureaucracy, combined with the natural ambitions of local elites, which assisted the decline of the councils. As local institutions faltered, mechanisms devised in the centre took their place. Although, by twentieth-century standards, the role of the state remained small, the apparatus of control became more overt, the persona of the emperor, as communicated through his public pronouncements and his laws, more overbearing, moralistic and intrusive on the private life of the citizen.

All emperors, including Christian emperors, were imperial autocrats first and Christians second – despite the efforts of their propagandists, such as Eusebius of Caesarea, to pretend otherwise. Piety, as Constantine proclaimed, brought victory – but having good soldiers helped as well (Prudentius, *Against Symmachus* 2). For emperors, Christian and pagan alike, had, as their chief duty, the defence of the empire. Although it had been possible, in the peaceful times of the second century, for emperors such as Hadrian to substitute other priorities for the search for military glory, the military character of the emperor was central to his function and the needs of the army could never be ignored. Strategic changes, such as the evolution of designated frontier forces and a central striking force based round the emperor or his deputies, did not affect the basic goals of imperial policy: victory and security. When these failed to be met in the West in the fifth century, the empire itself disintegrated.

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GRAECO-ROMAN PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION



Luther H. Martin

Doctrines must take their beginnings from that of the matters of which they treat.

(Giambattista Vico 1744)

‘Beginnings’, it has been suggested, is a more useful category for the investigation of early Christianity than the more common notion of ‘origins’, an idea that implies an ahistorical view of religion as somehow *sui generis*. Commenting on the passage from Vico cited above (Vico 1970: par. 314), Edward Said has argued that ‘beginnings’ acknowledges historical relationships of ‘continuity or antagonism or some mixture of both’ between doctrines and institutions studied and their context (Said 1975: 3, 347–81). In this sense, any historical investigation of early Christian beginnings must include their intellectual and religious alternatives in the Graeco-Roman world and the relationship of the early Christianities to these alternatives.

THE GRAECO-ROMAN, OR HELLENISTIC, WORLD

A change in the course of Western history was initiated by the conquests of Alexander the Great of Macedon (356–323 BCE) who successfully united the Greek peoples in opposition to Persian hegemony and, in the process, established a Graeco-Macedonian empire that extended from the Aegean in the West to the Indus River in India and from the Black Sea in the North to Nubia and the Sahara in Africa (Figure 3.1).

Already, the second-century CE Bithynian historian, Arrian, had written a seven-book history of Alexander, the *Anabasis of Alexander*, and a ten-book history of *Affairs after Alexander* (of which only fragments survive). It was not until the eighteenth century, however, that Alexander’s imperial conquests became defined as initiating a discrete period of history with a conclusion in 30 BCE, the year Augustus annexed Egypt, the final autonomous kingdom of Alexander’s former empire, into that of Rome (Gast 1782; similarly, Gillies 1807). The significance of this period of history, defined in political terms as extending from Alexander to Augustus, was initially dismissed by scholars as ‘of no interest in itself, and is only so far of value as

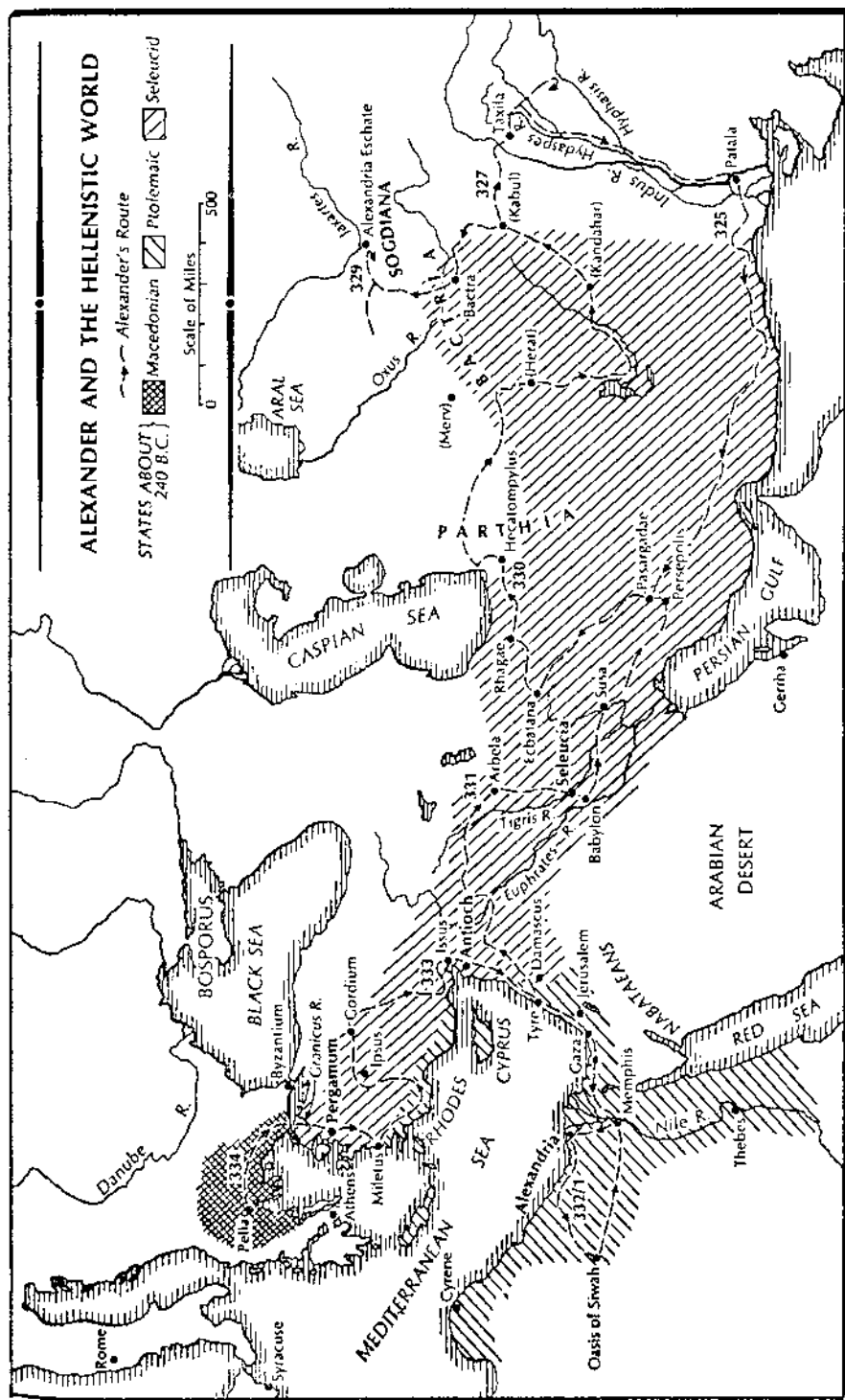


Figure 3.1 Map of Alexander's empire. From Martin (1987: 5), with the permission of Oxford University Press.

it helps us to understand the preceding centuries', at least until 'the absorption of Greece by the Romans'. It was certainly considered to have no influence 'on the destinies of the future world' (Grote 1854: x). Only in the final quarter of the nineteenth century did this important and transformational period of history begin to attract scholarly attention (with the second edition of Droysen's *Geschichte des Hellenismus*, 1877).

Scholarly neglect of the historical period after Alexander until late in the nineteenth century had much to do with the prevailing assumption among scholars in Christian Europe that a new historical era had been inaugurated during the reign of Augustus with the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1–7). The 'pagan' world of the period immediately preceding this Christian 'charter event' became relegated, thereby, to a theologically and thus historically diminished background against which the emergence of a new Christian period of Western history might be writ. A predominantly Christian culture was only realized historically and politically, however, in the final decades of the fourth century CE with the imperial decrees of the Christian emperor Theodosius that prohibited all non-Christian religious practices and established Christianity as the sole legitimate religion of the Roman empire. From this perspective, a Graeco-Roman period of cultural – in contrast to political – history may be defined as extending from the encounter of ideas and religious practices occasioned by the internationalism of the first 'Western' empire in the late fourth century BCE to the establishment of the West as a 'Christian culture' in the late fourth century CE; it includes the intellectual and religious histories not only of the Greek empire established by Alexander and those of his successors but also that of the Roman imperium as well. It is out of the world of this Graeco-Roman period with its largely 'Hellenistic' culture (Droysen 1836–1843), that the early Christianities emerged and were given their shape.

Broadly understood, the predicate 'Hellenistic' refers to the general diffusion of Greek culture among those peoples conquered by Alexander as a consequence of his Hellenizing policies, a cultural programme actively pursued by his successors. It included the establishment of Greek as the international language of politics and commerce, the introduction of Greek cultural and civic institutions into those cities among the peoples Alexander had incorporated into his empire, and even the founding of new Greek cities, such as Alexandria in Egypt, and subsequent Greek emigration as well as non-Greek immigration with a consequent dissemination of Greek values and ideas. Despite interactions which occurred as a consequence of cultural contact among the diverse cultures included in Alexander's empire, especially in the area of religion, it was Greek values and ideas which dominated into Late antiquity, even through the reign of Rome, and which defined a Hellenistic cultural world.

The category of 'world' has re-emerged in cultural studies to describe a bounded set of social relationships together with its system of acquired knowledge. It differs from the earlier idea of *Weltanschauung* or 'world view' first used by Kant to describe the holistic comprehension of the phenomenal world (Kant 1951: 93). In the nineteenth century, the notion was internalized to designate the subjective 'meaning' of the world in terms of an individual's total experience of reality; its formulation was considered the proper function of culture, pre-eminently, of

religion. In contrast to its Enlightenment and Romantic predecessors, the current usage of 'world' is as an analytic category employed to describe a particular religious system in terms of 'cosmos' and 'nomos', coextensive scientific and socio-political categories of world formation and maintenance (Berger 1967: 24; see Paden 1994). Whereas the scientific framework of Hellenistic culture has received some attention in connection with the relationship between cosmology and religion (Martin 1987), the nomic or social aspects of both Hellenistic philosophy and religion have received less. And the question concerning the relationship between these 'vertical' and 'horizontal' grids of world structure remains largely unaddressed.

Hellenistic cosmology

The scientific framework of the Hellenistic world is well exemplified by the Ptolemaic cosmology, the first comprehensively scientific view of the cosmos (Figure 3.2). Named for the second-century CE Alexandrian astronomer and mathematician, Claudius Ptolemy, who compiled and systematized contemporaneous astronomical knowledge in his 13-book *Almagest*, this cosmological model developed earlier Babylonian, Persian, Egyptian and Greek astronomical and astrological observations into a mathematically precise system. Its descriptive and predictive efficacy endured until the sixteenth century when the Copernican cosmological revolution established for modernity a view first proposed in the third century BCE by Aristarchus of Samos – the heliocentric model of the 'solar system'.

Most simply, the Ptolemaic cosmology described a geocentric system in which the earth, fixed in its position, was encompassed by seven successive spheres identified with the planets visible to the naked eye. Although alternative planetary orders were proposed, the most common was: the moon (considered, from a geocentric perspective, a planet), Mercury, Venus, the sun (like the moon, considered a planet), Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. The scientific basis for this system may be traced from the fourth-century BCE astronomer, Eudoxus of Cnidus, who described the motion of these heavenly bodies as concentric spheres moving around different axes and devised a mathematical explanation for these motions. This entire planetary system was understood to be encompassed within a stationary 'realm of the fixed stars'. This image of the cosmos – though not all of its mathematical evidence – was dominant in Hellenistic culture from its beginnings.

In the second century BCE, the Bithynian astronomer Hipparchus discovered the precession of the equinoxes, the gradual movement of the plane of the earth's equator relative to the stars. This observation, explained in modern astronomy as a wobble in the earth's axis, could only be understood in terms of the static geocentricity of Hellenistic science as movement in the entire celestial structure, including the realm of the stars. Since the fixed and motionless character of the stars was seen as the most important source of and reference for regularity and stability in the universe, and provided the empirical reference for speculations concerning an 'Absolute', Hipparchus' discovery challenged any view of existence modelled upon cosmic immutability (Ulansey 1989: 76–82).

Following Hipparchus' discovery, philosophical and religious questions and reflections were increasingly modified or reformulated in consonance with this revi-

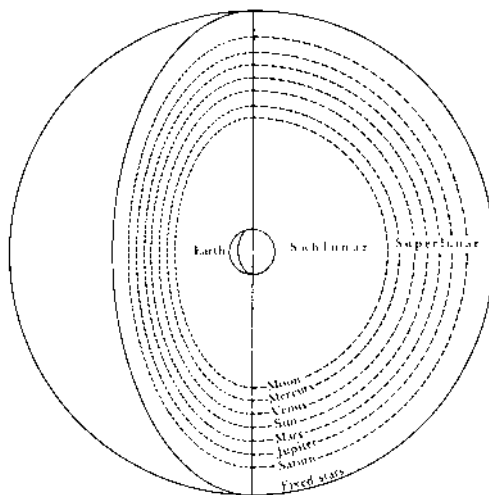


Figure 3.2 Diagram of the Ptolemaic cosmos. From Martin (1987: 9), with the permission of Oxford University Press.

sionist scientific discovery. The natural order of things, for example, once acknowledged as the inviolate rule of 'fate', became relativized as the problematic of cosmic transitoriness now designated by the play of 'chance' (personified as *Tych* or *Fortuna*). And the gods, once imagined as superhuman beings inhabiting high places and the celestial regions, had to be relocated from their now transitory terrestrial, and increasingly even from their celestial, loci to an atemporal, transcendental locus and reimagined as supernatural and 'other-worldly'. This Hellenistic problematic was expressed by Pliny the Elder in the first century BCE:

Everywhere in the whole world at every hour by all men's voices Fortune alone is invoked and named . . . and we are so much at the mercy of chance that Chance herself, by whom God is proved uncertain, takes the place of God.

(*Natural History* 2.5.22)

A few examples will suffice to illustrate that early Christians, too, were concerned with these cosmological transformations and referenced their problematic. The astrological character of the story in the Gospel of Matthew about 'Magi from the East' who followed a star to Bethlehem in order to pay homage to the 'newborn King of the Jews' (Matt. 2:1–12) has been well considered (e.g. Brown 1977: 166–77). Less noticed are the astrological implications of the discrepancy between the Gospel according to Matthew and that according to Luke as to whether conception or birth was the most propitious moment from which to calculate the 'starting point' of Jesus' life. The author of Matthew seems to attribute significance to the birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:16, 18–24) while the author of Luke emphasizes his conception (Luke 1:30, 35). These different views concerning the beginning of life reflect a technical debate in astrological practice, as Ptolemy documented (*Tetrabiblos* 3. 1).

Second, we might note that the Gospel according to Mark, which recounts stories

neither of conception nor of birth, begins its account of Jesus' life with his baptism by John. On this occasion, the gospel reports, 'the heavens opened . . . and a voice came from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son"' (Mark 1:10–11). The Greek verb for the 'opening' of the heavens is *schizō*, 'to tear' or 'to rend asunder'. The only other occurrence of this word in this gospel is at the conclusion of the life of Jesus when he 'uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last'. At that moment, the gospel notes that 'the curtain of the [Jerusalem] temple *was torn* in two, from top to bottom' (Mark 15:37–8). This temple veil was described by Josephus as depicting a comprehensive representation of the heavens (Josephus, *JW* 5.214). Thus, the author of this Gospel marks the end of Jesus' life as he marks the beginning – with reference to a 'rending of the cosmos' (Ulansey 1991).

Even as the Gospel of Mark seems to equate the life and death of Jesus with an alteration in the existing cosmic order, so Paul proclaims that Christians are liberated from an earlier view of the cosmos (Gal. 4:3). Paul described the dominance of this earlier view in terms of an observance of 'days, and months, and seasons, and years' (Gal. 4:10), seemingly a reference to the biblical creation story in which God creates the 'lights [the sun, the moon and the stars] in the firmament of the heavens . . . for signs and for seasons and for days and for years' (Gen. 1:14–15). However, this passage also references Hellenistic astrological concerns generally. The various early Christian groups, in other words, regularly referenced their scientific/cosmological context in their theological formulations.

Socio-political context of the Hellenistic world

More complex than the more or less commonly assumed cosmological framework of the Hellenistic world was its diverse socio-political structure. This complex structure can be typologized, however, in terms of two alternative kinds of social organization: kingship, on the one hand, a consolidation of power such as was claimed by the Hellenistic rulers; and kinship, on the other, a dispersion of power consequent upon the spread of numerous alternative social groupings typically organized on the basis of kin claims.

Power in the Graeco-Roman world was officially claimed, and often imposed, by the structures and functionaries of the imperium, whether that of Alexander, those of his diverse successors, or that reinstated by Rome. These imperial or kingship claims were reinforced by state cults, including, finally, the deification of the emperor. Already Alexander had encountered in Persia cult practices that attributed divine qualities to their king. In Egypt he found a formal cult of the king as god (Taylor 1931: 6) and, in both places, the young king himself was so received. In 324 BCE, in response to Alexander's demand, Athens, followed by other Greek cities, voted Alexander to be Dionysus (Taylor 1931: 21–3). In later accounts, Alexander's virgin mother was impregnated by a lightning bolt; her son nevertheless claimed to be descended on his father's side from Heracles, the greatest of the Greek heroes, and on his mother's side from Achilles, the bravest of Homeric heroes (Plutarch, *Alexander* 2; Nilsson 1951: 108). Both heroes, according to Greek mythology, had ascended to divine status. By claiming 'succession' from Alexander, the Hellenistic kings also made claim to heroic and divine descent (Taylor 1931:

25). Julius and Augustus were the real successors of Alexander, both in political terms as in that of the divine right to rule they claimed – a right subsequently claimed by monarchy in the West until the rise of the modern democratic state.

Alternative to the consolidation and centralization of political power exemplified by Alexander's empire and by the subsequent Hellenistic and Roman kingdoms, a legion of counter-cultural groups – clubs or *collegia* – proliferated during the Hellenistic period claiming, by default, social power for themselves, whether that dispersion of power was expressed in political, religious, esoteric or transcendental terms. Documented from the political context of classical Greece (Thucydides 3.82; 8.54, 65), the founding and spread of such associations was provoked by the new possibilities of commercial and mercenary activity occasioned by the international successes of empire itself. As inhabitants of once locally defined cultures ventured forth into the cosmopolitan context of the Hellenistic world, they understandably sought to retain something of their traditional ancestry and identity: their language, their dress, their cuisine, their religion. Consequently, these new immigrants often formed 'social clubs' with their compatriots. They met together and drew up rules of association, they paid dues, they ate and drank together, they typically venerated one of their native deities as their patron and they often assumed the traditional familial responsibility for the 'proper' burial of their brethren in the alien lands they now inhabited. The ubiquitous characteristic of these Hellenistic associations was their sense of being a household or extended family, perhaps the most fundamental mode of human social organization. As one scholar summarizes the evidence concerning some 24 voluntary associations on Delos, they 'reinforced a sense of kinship and national identity on an island where disparate nationalities and languages abounded' (McLean 1996: 189).

Greek society and state, like that of virtually all cultures, had been founded on the family – groups of men who claimed descent from a common ancestor. This ancestor gave his name to the family and the veneration of the ancestor gave religious sanction to these social entities (Nilsson 1951: 65). If, for some reason, a common ancestor was absent, one might be invented, especially if a heroic or divine progenitor was desired. Whether ethnic or fictive, the sense of kinship was the most common characteristic of the Hellenistic associations (Kloppenborg and Wilson 1996: 13, 18, 112, 132, 134–5, 180, 189). The establishment of fictive kin ties by adoption was a common Graeco-Roman practice of kin recruitment that ensured legitimate descendants in the face of high mortality. And Hellenization, in the sense of assimilating non-Greeks to Greek culture, often involved inventing for colonized or conquered peoples eponyms that might be connected with figures from Greek myths who had similar names (Nilsson 1951: 97, 98, 105). 'Greekness' was a matter of kinship (Thucydides 1.95.1).

While the Hellenistic kinship groups or 'clubs' seem to have limited membership to a particular ethnic group and/or to class or gender, some at least, experimented with values of inclusiveness and equality in the face of a largely segregated and hierarchical world – as did some early Christians. The association of Zeus in Philadelphia, for example, admitted 'men and women, freeborn and slaves' (Kloppenborg 1996: 25; see Paul in 1 Cor. 12:13). These alternative values may have derived from the private religious associations of classical Athens in which foreigners, women and

slaves all enjoyed equal rights with Athenian citizens (Foucart 1873: 5–12). Or, these values may have been championed for the Hellenistic world by the notion of ‘the brotherhood of mankind’ attributed to the emperor Alexander (see the prayer for the ‘unity of mankind’ reported by Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexandria* 7.11). Whether or not such a programme was ever advanced by Alexander, Hellenistic romances about him clearly propagated this value in his name. Thus, the first-century BCE historian Diodorus Siculus wrote that the bringing together of the largest continents through intermarriage and ties of kinship to a common harmony and family ties was among Alexander’s ‘last plans’ (Diodorus Siculus 18.4.4). Similarly Plutarch averred that Alexander ‘instructed all men to consider the inhabited world to be their native land . . . being blended together by ties of blood and the bearing of children’ (Plutarch, *The Fortune of Alexander* 1.329C–D).

The claims to universal brotherhood and, thus, to centralized power inevitably established the political state in opposition to the dispersion of alternative social organizations with their local and limited criteria of kinship, no matter how egalitarian they may otherwise have been. It is this oppositional character inherent in the two differing types of socio-political organization and to their differing views of power that thrust Hellenistic efforts at imperial rule into conflict with the kinship associations. The dispersion of any such organized subgroups is typically viewed as a threat to the centralized authority and stability of political power unless a mutually accommodating relationship can be assured.

Classical Greek philosophy had always attempted to legitimate the dominant, non-democratic forms of rule. ‘Thales’ [sixth-century BCE] *sophia* was an attempt to legitimate tyranny, whereas the *philosophia* of Pythagoras and of later thinkers was designed to provide a non-democratic alternative to post-tyrannical society’ (Frischer 1982: 16). And Greek religion was always supportive of the state. As the classical Greek view of a world ordered by laws of nature that man and polis sought to replicate and to which even the gods were subject became confounded by the socio-political conflict wrought by the warring successors to Alexander’s empire, innovative and redefined philosophical schools and novel religious associations proliferated as alternatives to political order imposed by the Hellenistic kings. Examples from both the philosophical and religious traditions were accepted by political power as supportive, or at least non-threatening, while others, including the early Christianities, were viewed as subversive, or at least suspicious.

The writing of a Christian ‘universal history’ by the author of Luke-Acts, was an early Christian referencing of Roman international hegemony; the author even has a Roman centurion support the innocence of Jesus (Luke 23:47). However, this Lucan history, established by the later Christian world as ‘normative’, was at the time of its writing only one of a wide spectrum of views held by various ‘Jesus people’ and ‘Christ cults’ making differing claims upon the name of Jesus (Smith 1990; Mack 1988, 1993, 1995). Some of these groups – the group which produced ‘Q’, the early Jesus ‘sayings source’, for example, and those who compiled Mark and the other ‘canonical’ gospels, and, of course, the letters of Paul – would eventually be reconciled, harmonized or synthesized into the Lucan-Roman model of a universalized theological history. Those ‘Christian’ groups who would not or could not accept the Lucan standard were branded as heretical: the group which produced the ‘Gospel of

Thomas', for example, or those which composed other non-canonical gospels or 'acts' of various apostles. When the Lucan view was accorded the authority of the 'Great Church' in the fourth century, these alternative Christian groups were themselves banished or burned.

The problematics, then, referenced by the early Christian movements, mirrored those addressed by Greek and Roman philosophical and religious groups generally. They pursued similar cosmic and nomic questions with similar assumptions. They all offered explanations for their view of the world, required a disciplined style of life with a clearly articulated goal, produced a tradition of exemplary predecessors – some of whom, like Socrates, were martyred – which culminated in a contemporaneous teacher, compiled an authoritative literature, and they all organized themselves in social groups defined by kinship terminology, membership in which required some type of formal conversion or initiatory rites (Nock 1933: ch. 5). And claims to superhuman power as the legitimating basis for their authority, the most minimal definition of a religious system, were as likely to be made by 'philosophical' as by 'religious' groups.

Of course, there were differences between groups within both traditions – for example, between those whose views were influenced by the supernaturalism of Platonic tradition and those which adhered to the more naturalistic tradition of Aristotle. And a major difference between Greek philosophical and religious systems generally was a different 'division of labour' concerning ethics. Whereas Hellenistic religious groups had been concerned, for example, with venerating and propitiating the gods and with legitimating the social boundaries over which they presided, whether of kin or king, they were not, like those groups that identified with the biblical tradition, concerned with questions of ethics, relegating this issue to philosophy.

To map the the differing philosophico-religious groups which populated the Graeco-Roman period, their goals and aspirations, their differences and similarities, is to map a central feature of the cultural world of Christian beginnings.

HELLENISTIC PHILOSOPHIES

Although a classical period of Greek philosophy is generally concluded with the death of Aristotle in 322 BCE, the year following the death of his student, Alexander the Great, the naturalistic and empirical tradition of research exemplified by Aristotle's work continued throughout the Hellenistic period. This tradition was exemplified not only by the observations of such astronomers as Aristarchus (fl. mid-third century BCE) and Hipparchus (fl. second-half of second century BCE) but also by the advances of such mathematicians as Euclid (c. 325–c. 250 BCE), Archimedes (c. 287–212 or 211 BCE), Apollonius of Perga (fl. 200 BCE) and Eratosthenes (c. 285–194 BCE) and by the work of the naturalist Theophrastus (372/1 or 371/2–288/7 or 287/6 BCE). Despite continuing progress in scientific knowledge, however, Hellenistic philosophy was primarily characterized by 'a critical synthesis of earlier philosophies about the world' (Frischer 1982: 34); and life during this period was increasingly understood as subjected to irrational forces – to chance for example, or

to powers beyond ordinary human control, which could only be dealt with by cult and magic (Samuel 1988: 169). This intellectual lapse, popularized in modern judgement as 'a failure of nerve' (Murray 1955), was as evident in the philosophical traditions as in the religious alternatives of the period. The popular successes of the Hellenistic philosophies were bought, in other words, at the price of their separation from scientific research (Long 1986: 12). By the time Rome eventually restored an ordered world through its efficient administration of empire, the general investigation of nature and of the role of rational man in the ordered cosmos had become largely replaced by a practical concern with ethics, the rule and exercise of life that might conclude a viable view of human identity in the face of both cosmological and socio-political transitoriness and transformation. Philosophical *theoria* was replaced, in other words, by *praxis*. All of the Hellenistic philosophical schools emphasized the question, first posed by Plato and Aristotle: 'What is happiness or well-being and how does a man achieve it?' (Long 1986: 6).

The increased focus upon practical ethics during the Hellenistic period established philosophers as exemplars and their philosophical 'schools' as, ideally, groups of exemplary followers. These schools not only endeavoured faithfully to transmit the teachings of their founder, whose thought, however, was in fact often elaborated and modified, but also to emulate his lifestyle. The first of the philosophical schools, established by Pythagoras in the sixth century BCE, were organized as quasi-religious associations that included rites of initiation, private teachings, the following of a dietary regime and provisions for burial (Burkert 1985: 302–3). In addition to the well-known contributions by the Pythagoreans to mathematics, music and astronomy, Pythagoreanism subsequently became a designation also for recondite religious movements. The establishment of the Pythagorean societies was followed in the fourth century by that of the Platonic 'Academy' and the Aristotelian 'Peripatetics', both organized on the legal model of religious associations, and then in the early third century by the founding of the Epicurean 'Garden' and of Stoicism (Mason 1996).

In his historical overview of philosophers from Thales to Epicurus, the third-century CE writer Diogenes Laertius described these philosophical schools as 'successions'. He further organized these 'successions' into two major traditions (1.13): an Ionian lineage, from the pre-Socratics, through Plato and Aristotle, culminating with the Stoics (1.22–7), and an Italian lineage, from Pythagoras to Epicurus (8–10). The Epicurean and Stoic traditions dominated philosophy in the early Hellenistic period along with a subsequent renaissance of Platonism from the late first century BCE.

The Epicureans

Epicurus (341–270 BCE), an Athenian citizen born on Samos, first met with some followers in the secluded garden of his home in Athens. His school, named after this original meeting place, soon spread throughout the Greek world and subsequently developed branches in Egypt, Asia, Mytilene and Lampsacus. By the first century BCE, Epicureanism had been introduced to the Roman world by Lucretius (c. 94–55 or 51?) through his magisterial poem *On the Nature of Things*. As such the Epicurean

schools – to which women were admitted as equals alongside men – epitomized the cosmopolitan and inclusivistic values of the larger Hellenistic world. Nevertheless, Epicurus and his followers rejected the allure of internationalization, opting instead for small alternative associations of philosophers bound by the ideal of friendship. The Epicureans recognized, however, the political reality of the civic world from which they sought to retire and they attempted, consequently, to establish good relations with those in power in order that they might be left alone (Frischer 1982: 40–1).

As with Hellenistic philosophy generally, the Epicureans were not so concerned with such abstractions as Plato's 'Good' or Aristotle's superlunar and super-human cosmos as with the immediate human condition and the practical goal of a happy life. Although they did not deny the existence of the gods, the Epicureans – like the eighteenth-century deists – did reject any view of divine intervention in the affairs of this world. Rather, the deities, in their sublime and tranquil detachment, provided the model for human detachment from civic life. The Epicureans attributed value, consequently, only to this-worldly reality as defined by sense perception.

Adopting and adapting the atomic theory of the fifth-century BCE philosopher Democritus, they understood the world as the consequence of an infinite number of atoms that might collide and, from time to time, combine to form the phenomena of the sensible universe. Holding the cosmos to be a natural if accidental combination of atoms that would, at some point, decompose, they epitomized the Hellenistic attribution of existence to chance. Since, consequently, any phenomenon had value only in terms of its immediate practical advantage, pleasure was considered the highest good by Epicurus and his followers. By 'pleasure', however, the Epicureans did not mean 'the pleasures of the prodigal or the pleasures of sensuality', as many understood them in antiquity as today. Rather, as Epicurus wrote in a 'Letter to Menoeceus' preserved by Diogenes Laertius: 'By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul . . . It is sober reasoning, searching out the grounds of every choice and avoidance, and banishing those beliefs through which the great tumults take possession of the soul' (Diogenes Laertius 10.122–35: 131). For the Epicureans, in other words, pleasure referred to the ideal of a trouble-free existence in which the body was healthy and the mind undisturbed.

Despite a veneration of Epicurus to the point of divinity by his followers (Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 5.1–54), the Epicurean emphasis on withdrawal from the political world and its dismissal of any transcendent destiny had little appeal to Romans and their ideal of a just and good state guaranteed by the gods. Consequently, this thoroughly materialistic tradition was eclipsed by Stoicism in the philosophical imagination of the later Hellenistic period.

The Stoics

Stoicism was founded by Zeno of Citium (335–263 BCE), who had begun his career as a student of Crates (c. 368/365–288/285 BCE), a follower of the Cynic philosopher, Diogenes of Sinope (c. 412/403–c. 324/321 BCE). In some ways similar to the Epicureans, the Cynics had taught that the wise man will reject what is conventional in order to follow a 'natural' way of life based on action rather than

thought. By ‘natural’, however, Diogenes meant ‘primitive’, and the Cynics consequently withdrew not only from civic life as did the Epicureans but flaunted as well all social convention as constructs contrary to their ascetic style of life. Although never institutionalized as a philosophical school, Cynicism continued to be influential throughout the Hellenistic period. Some have even noted a relationship between the simple lifestyle advocated by the Cynics, the aphoristic form of their teachings and their social critiques, and those of the earliest Jesus traditions (Mack 1988: 67–9 and 1993: 114–21).

When Zeno broke with Crates, he began to expound his own teachings in the marketplace of Athens among the colonnades (*stoa*), from which his school derived its name. He essentially developed the Cynic way of life into an ethical system which he integrated into a comprehensive philosophy. Zeno and his followers prided themselves on ‘the remarkable coherence of the[ir] system and the extraordinary orderliness of the subject-matter’ (Cato, in Cicero, *On the Ends of Good and Evil* 3.74). Generally, the Stoics conceived of the cosmos as an organic whole, a pantheistic system of universal law. They owed much of their success to an ability to unify, by means of allegory, the various philosophical and popular expressions of cosmic law, whether this ‘many-named’ cosmic law was imaged as fire, as taught by the fifth-century BCE philosopher Heraclitus, or as fate, the natural order of things (*heimarmenê*), or as the rational order of things (*logos*). This law received ‘religious’ expression by Zeno’s successor, Cleanthes (331–232 BCE) in his *Hymn to Zeus*:

Most glorious of immortals, Zeus
The many-named, almighty evermore,
Nature’s great Sovereign, ruling all by law –

[. . .]

For thee this whole vast cosmos, wheeling round
The earth, obeys, and where thou ledest
It follows, ruled willingly by thee.

(trans. Grant 1953: 152)

Stoicism provided, thereby, a philosophical rationale for the increasing universalism that came to characterize the Hellenistic philosophical and religious traditions.

Chrysippus (c. 280–207 BCE), the third head of the school after Cleanthes, refined the teachings of Zeno and consolidated them with various directions that were beginning to develop Stoic teachings into what thereafter was considered throughout the Hellenistic period to be the orthodox or standard position. ‘Had there been no Chrysippus’, the saying went, ‘there would have been no Stoa’ (Diogenes Laertius 7.183).

Despite the Stoic’s comprehensive integration of logic, physics and ethics, Stoicism attracted less interest in Late antiquity as a philosophical system than as a way of life, as the ethical writings of Seneca the Younger (c. 4 BCE/1 CE–65 CE), Epictetus (c. 50–c. 150 CE) and Marcus Aurelius (121–80 CE) exemplify. Since cosmic law, in the Stoic view, governed moral order as well as the natural world, to live a life of virtue was to live a harmonious life in accord with nature. The primary characteristic of this natural law was rationality (*logos*), and reason, consequently, was the way to

knowledge of its universal truth (Samuel 1988: 203). To cultivate this rationality, both a human endowment and the essence of divinity, and to live in harmony with it, was to become 'offshoots' of god (Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.14.6) and thus 'kin' with deity (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 10.6). The Stoics thus shared with Epicureans the goal of human perfectibility in this existence, but, in stark contrast to the Epicureans, the Stoic idea of a universal norm of virtue accorded more with the Platonic (and later Christian) view concerning the transcendental nature of truth.

Hellenistic Platonism

A 'middle-Platonism' may be traced from the reaction of Antiochus of Ascolon (c. 130–69/8 BCE) against the first-century BCE emergence of philosophical scepticism, a position which, claiming the authority of Socrates, rejected all doctrine and questioned all positions on the ground that things are finally unknowable (Diogenes Laertius 1.16). Influenced by Stoicism, however, Antiochus had understood that the goal of life was to live in accordance with nature. During this same century, Eudorus of Alexandria challenged this Stoic view of nature with the Platonic ideal of living in accordance with the 'likeness of god' (Plato, *Theatetus* 176B; Dillon 1977: 44). At about the same time, Nigidius Figulus, considered by Cicero to be the founder of neo-Platonism (Cicero, *Timaean* 1), revised and revived Pythagoreanism in Rome. Pythagoras' teachings had been preserved by Plato and had influenced especially Plato's views of cosmology (Plato, *Timaean*) and religion (Plato, *Phaedo*).

The transcendentalism of Hellenistic Platonism constituted a reaction against the scientific traditions of the Hellenistic period as well as against the materialistic and empirical philosophies of the Epicureans and, in part, the Stoics. Platonists had always differentiated between the world of the senses and the world of ideas, insisting that sense perception is subject to deception. Consequently, early Hellenistic philosophical appeals to sensual reality became supplemented and, in Late antiquity, even replaced by claims to a transcendental truth that blurred the distinction between philosophy and religion. If Stoicism first provided a philosophical rationale for the universalism that came to characterize Hellenistic religions, middle Platonism reinforced that rationale with a hypercosmic transcendentalism appropriate to the Ptolemaic cosmological map. This commitment of Hellenistic Platonism to 'a non-material, intelligible world beyond this one' together with 'a transcendent supreme principle' was central to all variations of Hellenistic Platonism; it culminated in the neo-Platonism of Plotinus (205–69/70 CE; Dillon 1977: 51).

Plotinus understood that the true self or soul is a child of 'God', the 'Father' or the 'One' (*Enneads* 2.9.16), and that those who are with the One are, consequently, 'brothers' (*Enneads* 5.18.12). The souls, in other words, are children of 'their father, God' which are 'brought up far away' not knowing 'who they themselves or their parents are' (*Enneads* 5.5.1). Those who know themselves – which is the command of God (*Enneads* 4.3.1) – will know their genealogy and, consequently, their divine origins (*Enneads* 6.9.7). For Plotinus, in other words, the human soul is kin by nature to the higher reality (*Enneads* 1.6.2; 2.3.9; 2.9.18; 3.3.1; 3.5.1; 4.4.45). Recognition of this kinship with God is the beginning of the soul's return.

Early philosophers had routinely claimed descent from the gods who gave sanc-

tion to the existing social and political order, or at least they claimed some analogy between themselves and divine characteristics (Frischer 1982: 18, 77–9). Pythagoras, for example, had not only claimed descent from Hermes (Diogenes Laertius 8.4) but asserted also that ‘only god is wise’ and that philosophy was ‘the love of wisdom’ (Diogenes Laertius 1.12; Frischer 1982: 20–1). Modern differences assumed between at least some of the philosophical schools and religious traditions, both social alternatives which sought legitimation by claims to superhuman power, were not so sharp in antiquity; their claim of kinship with the gods by descent later became transformed into philosophical and theological claims of epistemological privilege concerning Truth.

Given Plotinus’ emphasis on the kinship of realized souls, his vision of the ideal society would be constituted as a kinship group on the social model of those alternative communities that proliferated in the Hellenistic period generally. Plotinus actually petitioned the Emperor Gallienus to consign him a deserted city in Campania which he and his aristocratic companions might resettle according to his utopian ideals under the name of ‘Platonopolis’ (Porphry, *Life of Plotinus* 12). Although Plotinus’ request was rejected, his utopian vision was revived in Christian metaphor by Augustine’s ideal of a transcendental ‘City of God’ – a legitimating model for political hierarchy (Williams 1955: 9–10) and the ‘dream of many Christian centuries’ (Hardy 1955: 257).

HELLENISTIC RELIGIONS

Whereas philosophy retained an essentially Hellenic character during the Graeco-Roman period, and was consequently one of the factors that shaped Hellenistic culture, the history of religions was profoundly altered by the cultural contacts and interactions initiated by the conquests of Alexander. Native cults with their base in local populations, including native Greek cults such as those of Dionysus, for example (Nilsson [1957] 1975), or of the Eleusinian Demeter, found themselves increasingly situated in an international and multicultural context. The Hellenization of these previously local deities, the Egyptian Isis, for example, and of their cults, involved their adaptation and transformation to the newly established and increasingly dominant Greek language, to conditions of scientific/astronomical universalism, political internationalism, and consequences of military and commercial mobility and subsequent emigration.

Not all native religions wholeheartedly embraced Hellenization. Some, like the Hellenistic associations, resisted by attempting to preserve their traditional linguistic and cultural forms and, especially, the native character of their local deities; some even resisted Hellenization to the point of revolt against its political pressures and its military forces (Eddy 1961; Rudolph 1983: 286, 288). A series of Egyptian anti-Hellenistic revolts from 245 BCE provide one example, as do the Jewish revolts against Seleucid attempts to Hellenize Jerusalem in the second century BCE (1 and 2 Macc.). Even Judaism, however, was strongly influenced by Hellenistic culture – especially in its Diaspora – as the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek around the second century BCE indicates. Known as the *Septuagint* (LXX), after the alleged

team of 72 translators, six from each of the 12 Jewish tribes, this translation, completed in exactly 72 days, was held to be as inspired and thus as authoritative for Greek-speaking Jews as was the Hebrew original (*Letter of Aristeas* 32, 307, 310–11). Those native cults which did not in some way adapt to the transformed conditions of the Hellenistic world survived only in poetic reference or political rhetoric, if at all.

Hellenistic mysteries

The religious form generally considered most characteristic of Hellenistic religiosity is the 'mystery cult'. The characterization is, however, elusive since 'mystery' is both the self-designation of a wide range of Hellenistic social groups, from small collegial associations to some well-established Hellenistic religions, as well as a modern categorization for a number of Hellenistic cults for which a certain 'family resemblance' is proposed. As a self-designation, 'mystery' indicated minimally an association in which membership required some formalized procedure or initiation (Gk. *mysteria* = Lat. *initia*), usually under the patronage of a particular deity. As a modern category, the Eleusinian Mysteries – also a self-designation – is most often presented as paradigmatic.

The Mysteries of Demeter

The Mysteries of Demeter, celebrated in the town of Eleusis, 14 miles west of Athens, seemingly developed from a family cult which initially admitted only citizens of Eleusis and perhaps only members of certain noble families of that town. At least the prerequisite for the priestly administrators of the cult was membership in one of two Eleusinian hereditary 'lineages' (*gen*).

According to a brief account of the origins of the Eleusinian Mysteries by the Athenian orator Isocrates (436–338 BCE), Demeter founded her cult in Eleusis out of gratitude for certain unspecified 'services' extended her by the 'ancestors' of Eleusis, and that initiation into the cult consisted, in part at least, of revealing to the initiates the nature of these 'services' (*Panegyricus* 28). According to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, one of the ancestors of Eleusis who had first shown Demeter hospitality and among those to whom she subsequently 'showed the conduct of her rites and taught . . . all mysteries' was Eumolpus, a presumed son of Poseidon and one of the mythical rulers of Eleusis (*Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 184, 475). In any case, the 'Hierophant', or chief priest of the Eleusinian cult, was selected from the Eumolpidae, the family which claimed descent from this ancestor, as were the so-called 'Exegetes of the Eumolpidae'. Similarly, the 'Daduch', the second highest administrator of the cult, and the offices of 'Sacred Herald' and 'Altar-priest' were selected from the Kerykes. Although the genealogy of this family is less clear, they claimed descent from the lineage of Keryx, the 'herald', who either was a son of Eumolpos (Pausanias 1.38.3) or of Hermes, the divine herald (Clinton 1974: 8; Mylonas 1961: 234).

Gennêtai, members of a particular *genos*, were generally identified by their claims of descent from a common ancestor. Such *gennêtai* were particularly concerned with the deity who was considered to be their ancestor or who had been the protector of the

ancestors from whom they claimed descent and who, consequently, had some responsibility in the cult of that deity (Foucart 1914: 224–5). In addition to those claiming descent from a common ancestor, a (fifth-century?) law defined *gennêtai* as including also ‘foster-brothers’ or ‘sisters’ as well as members of religious associations (Philochorus, fr. 35). The implication is that membership in a particular *genos* might also be conferred by adoption (or initiation) – even as a fictive ancestor might be adopted to give heroic or divine legitimacy to the *genos*. Under Greek and Roman law, adoptees were fully received into the family of the adopter – and into the familial cult – and accorded full rights of inheritance, succession and divine protection.

Isocrates’ account suggests, in other words, that a special relationship, claimed for the ancestral families of Eleusis and the deity Demeter, was ritually replicated in the instruction/initiation of the mysteries. In this way, initiation into the rites of Demeter established a fictive/adoptive relationship between the ancestral families of Eleusis and the initiate and, thereby, between Demeter and the initiate such as was claimed for the ancestors and the deity. At least one Hellenistic source indicates that claims to relationship with Demeter were even extended to kinship with the deity herself. According to the pseudo-Platonic dialogue *Axiochus*, dated in the second or first century BCE, Axiochus became ‘kin to the gods’ as a consequence of his initiation into the Eleusinian mysteries (pseudo-Plato, *Axiochus* 371D). Though there is little further documentation for this view, the notion of kinship with deity through adoption/ritual initiation might have had a basis in Homer’s *Odyssey* where Menelaos is promised an afterlife on the Elysian Plain as a consequence of his adoption into the family of the gods through his marriage to Helen (*Odyssey* 4.561–9). And, of course, Paul uses the juridical terms for adoption to describe those redeemed by God’s son as themselves adopted sons of God (Gal. 4:4–5; Rom. 8:14, 23).

The ten-day initiation rite into the Mysteries of Eleusis was celebrated in the latter part of each September. The celebration began at the Eleusinion in Athens, where a branch of the Eleusinian cult had been established and a ‘lesser mysteries’ celebrated each spring in recognition of Athenian political dominance, but then moved in torchlight procession to Eleusis along the ‘Sacred Way’. The institution of a procession from the ruling centre to the cult place was a procedure typically followed in the spread of cults too closely identified with their locale to be fully disseminated (Nilsson 1951: 16, 38). After a day of rest and fasting, the pilgrims would enter the sacred precincts of Demeter and into the Telesterion or the ‘House of Initiation’ therein for the initiation rite itself. Figure 3.3 reflects what they experienced. This ‘night of mysteries’ was followed again by rest and finally by the return of the new initiates from the religious centre of the pan-Hellenic world to Athens, its cosmopolitan centre.

The sole requirement for initiation throughout the history of the mysteries (apart from such practical necessities as sufficient funds to travel to Eleusis, per diem, and cultic expenses such as providing for the required sacrifices) was that the initiates not have taken human life and that they speak Greek – the latter being the same linguistic criterion that defined the social boundary between Greek and barbarian generally. Thus, initiatory admission into the Eleusinian community generally supported kin-claims of ‘Greekness’. To this extent, the international popularity of the Eleusinian cult during the period following the conquests of Alexander furthered his



Figure 3.3 Kistophoros Caryatid, which supported (with a matching sculpture) the roof of the sanctuary of Demeter at Eleusis; the *kiste* or sacred basket which she carries on her head probably contained the ‘objects’ of the mysteries and is decorated with symbols of the cult: ears of corn, poppies and rosettes. Photo Luther H. Martin.

programme of Hellenization, and that of his successors. Whatever their attraction, the Eleusinian mysteries continued to expand at the beginning of the Hellenistic period and endured through the fourth century AD as an empire-wide festival.

The Mysteries of Isis

Although the worship of Isis had been familiar to Greeks since the fifth century BCE when Herodotus had identified Demeter with the Egyptian deity (Herodotus 2.42, 48, 145), the worship of Isis outside of Egypt was initially limited to associations of expatriate Egyptians. In the fourth century BCE, for example, the veneration of a pre-Hellenistic Isis is documented among some Egyptian immigrants in Athens (Heyob 1975: 6). By the third century BCE, however, Hellenized cults of Isis are documented along the Greek coast and on some of the Greek islands (Heyob 1975: 7).

In contrast to the Mysteries of Demeter, which retained its traditional cult centre at Eleusis and to which initiates were required to travel if they desired to become initiates, a non-ethnically based Hellenized Mysteries of Isis finally spread, according to Diodorus Siculus, through ‘practically the entire inhabited world’ (Diodorus

Siculus 1.25.4) – not, however, without resistance from Rome. Given imperial suspicion of foreign-sounding associations, Rome attempted to suppress the cult in the first century BCE and again early in the first century CE. This popular cult nevertheless survived and flourished until the prohibition of paganism at the end of the fourth century CE. Figure 3.4 shows the cult site at Pompeii.

The Hellenistic Mysteries of Isis shared some interesting features with that of Demeter. Whereas similarities between differing religious groups sharing a cultural context can often be accounted for by varying perspectives on common cultural problematics, those between the Demeter and Isis cults, as among a number of Hellenized native cults and religious innovations during the period, may in part be accounted for by their overt modelling on the renowned Eleusinian rites. According to Plutarch, Timotheus, a Hierophant of the Eumolpid family, had been summoned from Eleusis by Ptolemy Soter of Egypt (367/6–282 BCE) to assist the king in propagating a new cult of Serapis as Isis' consort (Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 28). And, in Plutarch's account, there are a number of similarities between the Hellenized myth of Isis and the version of the Demeter myth preserved in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*: Isis, like Demeter, founded her own cult after a period of sorrowful wandering, during their wanderings both goddesses came to rest by a spring in silence until taken in by the local queen as a nurse for her infant child, and, in a curious story common to both accounts, the two deities burned away the mortality of their adopted child by night. Despite such common motifs, apparently borrowed from the earlier myth of Demeter, the Hellenized Mysteries of Isis retained its Egyptian 'aura' by employing Egyptian iconic motifs and by displaying sacred books purportedly written in Egyptian hieroglyphics, a language that, according to the second-century CE writer and purported initiate, Apuleius, was 'impossible to be read' by non-initiates (*Metamorphoses* 11.22).

Since Hellenistic religious groups apparently recognized no official headquarters or authority (the Eleusinian cult being an exception) which might have sent out missionaries to propagate a particular doctrine or which might have ensured some measure of 'orthodoxy', the question remains how to account for the widespread dissemination of such formerly native religious cults as that of Isis. It would seem that a number of formerly native religions might initially have developed from the Hellenistic proliferation of ethnic associations; there is no question that a 'religious' (or idealistic) dimension was 'embedded' in virtually all of these groups (Kloppenborg 1996: 18; Cotter 1996: 79). When the ethnic or familial rationale for these ethnic societies was no longer compelling, as in cases of assimilation, mobility, or demise of the first generation, new members could be recruited by conferring kinship status upon non-ethnic petitioners through rites of initiation modelled on the widespread juridical practice of adoption. Some of these fictive-kin societies, many of which already claimed the designation 'mystery', may have evolved into the famous mystery cults of the Hellenistic world in which formerly familial or native deities became universalized in order to provide patronage for their clientele in an internationalized context.

The sole reason for anyone to be initiated into such a cult as that of the Egyptian Isis would be if he or she were in fact 'non-Egyptian'. Membership in the Hellenized (second-century CE) Mysteries of Isis was no longer attainable, according to



Figure 3.4 Temple of Isis at Pompei. Photo J. C. N. Coulston.

Apuleius' Isis novel *Metamorphoses*, by birth or by inheritance (*Metamorphoses* 11.15) but by an initiatory rebirth (*Metamorphoses* 11.16, 21) in which Isis became recognized as the initiate's spiritual mother and the presiding priest of Isis as his spiritual father (*Metamorphoses* 11.25). An earlier story in the novel proleptically confirms this view of initiation: Venus, who is subsequently identified with Isis (*Metamorphoses* 11.2), admonished her son for his disobedience and threatened to 'produce another son much better than' him through 'adoption' and bequeathing to this adopted son her divine legacy (*Metamorphoses* 5.29).

Whereas the Mysteries of Isis, like that of Demeter, retained its character of conferring fictive kinship, at least in its initiatory discourse, the Hellenized cult of Isis thoroughly redefined the character of its formerly Egyptian deity as a 'universal queen of heaven' (*Metamorphoses* 11.2, 5). Unlike the local deities of an earlier period, Hellenistic deities like Isis came to be understood as playing a cosmic role. Thus, in contrast to the Hellenistic problematic of life governed by a cosmic rule of chance or fortune, Isis was portrayed as the beneficent 'Good Fortune' that 'is not blind, but can see' (*Metamorphoses* 11.15). Initiation into the Mysteries of Isis involved, in other words, not only adoption into the 'ethnic' circle of the Hellenized Isis and the acquisition of her 'Egyptian' wisdom but also her universalized cosmic protection.

The Mysteries of Glycon

The oracle and 'mysteries' of Glycon, established in the second century CE by Alexander of Abonoteichos, offer a good example of Hellenistic religious innovation

on the model of the Eleusinian mysteries. According to an exposé of Alexander by his contemporary Lucian of Samasota (*Alexander the False Prophet*), Alexander began his career as a teacher of spirituality in the tradition of Apollonius of Tyana, a first-century contemporary of Jesus and an itinerate neo-Pythagorean sage who healed the sick, exorcised demons and taught ascetic purity. Subsequently, Alexander teamed up with a certain Cocconas and the two devised an elaborate scheme to construct an oracle of 'Glycon' who they claimed was a new manifestation of Asclepius, the physician deity who cured illness by giving oracular instructions through dreams and who was most often portrayed with a serpent coiled about his staff. Following the untimely death of Cocconas, Alexander successfully established his oracle in Abonoteichus. This oracle, which involved a serpent, a puppet head controlled by hidden strings and a speaking tube, amazed the growing crowds which responded to extravagant reports that Alexander had planted throughout the empire (Lucian, *Alexander the False Prophet* 15, 26).

Eventually, Alexander established 'a celebration of mysteries' over which he presided as hierophant accompanied by 'a number of would-be Eumolpids and Kerykes' but which explicitly excluded such 'atheists' as Epicureans and Christians. The rites of these mysteries included an initial proclamation 'as at Athens', a reference to the Athenian proclamation that preceded the Eleusinian mysteries, and 'torchlight ceremonies' as in the Eleusinian celebrations (Lucian, *Alexander the False Prophet* 38–40). The widespread popularity of this cult, which was given imperial recognition by Marcus Aurelius, is corroborated by a number of gems, coins and inscriptions discovered from this period (Harmon 1925: 173).

The Mysteries of Mithras

The 'Mysteries of Mithras' provide an example of religious innovation based on fictive claims to ethnicity. According to Plutarch, Romans were introduced to the cult of Mithras, originally an Indo-Persian deity, by Cilician pirates who had been transported to Italy following their defeat in 67 BCE by the Roman general Pompey (Plutarch, *Life of Pompey* 24). Whatever the historical origins of Roman Mithraism, it is clear that the Mysteries of Mithras were one of the 'new' religions of the late Hellenistic period. Its widespread presence is documented from the second through the fourth century CE by archaeological finds of Mithraea or Mithraic temples. While Mithraic finds are distributed throughout the Roman world, they are clustered especially in Rome and its vicinity as well as along the borders of the empire, especially along Hadrian's Wall in England, along the Rhine and Danube and Rome's Eastern frontier. This distribution of Mithraea along the boundaries of the empire but centring in Rome itself has led some to suggest that perhaps Mithraism was largely a Roman innovation rather than a cult transported from Persia. Although Persia itself was one of Rome's traditional enemies, this view capitalizes upon Mediterranean peoples' attraction to 'wisdom from the East' – similar to that in the modern West, an attraction which in antiquity dates from the attribution of universal wisdom to Pythagoras as the consequence of his purported travels in Egypt.

While dispersed throughout the empire, Mithraic organization was characterized

by numerous small, apparently autonomous, groups. Inscriptions indicate that these Mithraic cells, similar to other religious groups of the Hellenistic period, were organized as 'brotherhoods' under the leadership of a 'father', the highest of the seven grades of Mithraic initiation. Initiation into this brotherhood, consequently, must have had overtones of adoption into the Mithraic 'family lineage', a fictive genealogy that originated with the 'Persian' deity, Mithras, and, according to the name of the fifth stage of initiation, claimed Persians as ancestors. Consequently, all members of this *gens* (= Gk. *genos*), were, in principle, eligible to achieve the highest grade of initiation, the presiding 'pater' – functionally equivalent to 'hierophant' – and to minister to his own Mithraic cell, contributing thereby to the spread of the cult.

Although the Mithraic groups seem to have shared the similarity of kin-organization, there seems to have been no unifying doctrine for the cult apart from the ubiquitous presence of the tauroctony or central cult image of Mithras slaying a bull. This image has been identified as a 'star-map' with each of its component images, e.g. the dog, cup, scorpion, bull representing signs of the zodiac positioned with respect to the celestial equator.

The cult icon clearly indicates an astral orientation for the cult (Figure 3.5). Each Mithraeum, constructed in caves or rooms made to resemble caves (with a spectacular example of the latter to be seen in the Baths of Caracalla (Figure 3.6) and in the basement of San Clemente in Rome), symbolized the cosmos; their arched ceilings were often decorated with planets, stars, or the signs of the zodiac.



Figure 3.5 Fresco of a Mithraic Tauroctony from Marino. Photo Luther H. Martin.



Figure 3.6 Mithraeum beneath the Baths of Caracalla in Rome. Photo J. C. N. Coulston.

When initiates, in rites held in these Mithraea, proceeded progressively through the seven grades of Mithraic initiation, they symbolically ascended a seven-runged ladder of initiation (Figure 3.7). As a result, Mithraic initiates ritually transcended this-worldly existence with its cosmic and social problematics and symbolically entered for a time into the eighth, hypercosmic heaven. Mithraism thus shared with late-antique Platonism a soteriological goal of cosmic transcendence (see the reports of the neo-Platonist Porphyry on Mithraism, in Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.22 and Porphyry, *De antro nympharum* 5–6, 15, 18, 20 and 24).

Gnostic and hermetic traditions

At the core of those positions that may be termed ‘gnostic’ is a dualistic view of the cosmos, in which spirit and matter are understood to be sharply antithetical, together with the conviction that the true or spiritual self is consubstantial with a spiritual reality or deity which transcends the material cosmos. This consubstantiality with a transcendental or hypercosmic deity was based on gnostic claims to spiritual descent from and, therefore, kinship with the deity. The nature of this genealogical descent was spelled out in various mythologies of cosmogonic fall that offered an explanation for the gnostics’ earthly existence in the flesh, governed by the senses. In a tractate representative of the ‘Sethian’ gnostic tradition, we read, for example, that after the Invisible Spirit had placed Adam over the first aeon ‘with the mighty one, the Autogenes, the Christ’,



Figure 3.7 Mithraic 'Ladder' of Initiation from the Mithraeum of Felicissimus at Ostia.
Photo Luther H. Martin.

he placed his son Seth over the second aeon . . . And in the third aeon the seed [descendants] of Seth was placed . . . And the souls of the saints were placed (there). And in the fourth aeon the souls were placed of those who do not know the Pleroma and who did not repent at once, but who persisted for a while and repented afterwards.

(*The Apocryphon of John* II.1.9.11–22; trans. Robinson 1990: 109–10)

If a soteriological 'restoration' was to be 'realized', one's true origin and spiritual genealogy must be 'known'. In the famous words of Theodotus, a second-century Valentinian (one of the two major gnostic traditions alongside the Sethian), true knowledge is that 'of who we were, and what we have become, where we were or where we were placed, whither we hasten, from what we are redeemed, what birth is

and what rebirth' (*Excerpts of Theodotus* 78.2; trans. Casey 1934). Gnosticism explicitly represented, consequently, the kinship claims characteristic of Hellenistic social groups generally but now expressed cosmologically in terms of the revival of Platonic transcendentalism in the late Hellenistic period.

Some gnostics in third-century Rome, in fact, associated themselves with the neo-Platonic circle of Plotinus and even attended some of the philosopher's lectures (*Enneads* 2.9.10). Perhaps because of the closeness of this association, Plotinus wrote a treatise *Against the Gnostics* attempting to distinguish his teachings from theirs (*Enneads* 2.19). Whereas the gnostics rejected this material world and, consequently, its creator as evil and developed their teachings around the theme of a hypercosmic or transcendental goal, Plotinus maintained that this creation is good and beautiful — an argument that later led Augustine to break with the Manichaean-gnostic tradition with which he had earlier identified. And, according to the philosophers, the gnostics complained that 'Plato had not penetrated to the depths of intelligible reality' and they appealed, consequently, to occult revelations by such figures as Zoroaster, Zostrianus, Nicotheus, Allogenes, Messos (Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 16). This claim by the gnostics to an oral tradition of revelation allowed a degree of mythological imagination in these traditions that exceeded the rational speculations of even the most metaphysically inclined of the philosophers and was matched only in the hermetic tradition.

Hermeticism was a philosophico-religious tradition that was similar in many ways to that of the gnostics, though the oral teaching to which the hermetists appealed was transmitted characteristically in the 'succession' of Hermes, the Greek name for the Egyptian deity Thoth (Herodotus 2.67, 138). Like the Greek Hermes, Thoth was a guider of souls, a messenger of the gods and the lord of wisdom. In addition, the Hellenistic Hermes/Thoth was considered by some to be the ruler of the heavenly bodies and of their influence on individual destiny (Fowden 1986: 22–3). Whereas the hermetic traditions also assumed consubstantiality with deity, many of them assumed some sort of continuity rather than dualism between matter and spirit and employed, consequently, an 'alchemical' strategy in which matter as well as spirit might be transformed.

Though there may have been organized gnostic and hermetic associations, little is known of their social organization; rather their transcendental views seem to have been interpretations of existing traditions, such as Pythagoreanism, Platonism, Judaism, and especially Christianity. Thus, Valentinus, one of the more well-known of the Christian gnostics, claimed an interpretation of Christianity that was based upon direct revelation from the child *Logos*. And Theodotus wrote, with reference to typical Hellenistic cosmic imagery, that 'a strange and new star arose doing away with the old astral decree, shining with a new unearthly light, which revolved on a new path of salvation, as the Lord himself, men's guide, who came down to earth to transfer from Fate to his providence those who believed in Christ' (*Excerpts of Theodotus* 74.2).

Adherents of these hierarchically structured interpretations understood themselves to possess an understanding superior to that held by non-gnostic, 'orthodox' representatives of the various traditions to which they adhered, even as Plotinus understood his philosophical interpretations to be superior to those of traditional

Platonism. Nevertheless, their claims to kinship with transcendental reality, which essentially divinized the human, represented a bold, humanistic challenge to the enduring materialistic traditions of Hellenistic philosophy, and came to dominate Western philosophy and religion until the modern rise of the empirical sciences.

CONCLUSIONS

Recent scholarship has redeemed the Graeco-Roman period and its Hellenistic culture from earlier judgements about its insignificance. In addition to their own intrinsic and enduring values, Hellenistic intellectual traditions and religious practices were the forces that produced and propelled those first experiments in thought and practice that later became known collectively as 'Christian', as well as providing the foil against which the early Christianities defined their identity. These forces and foils only a few of which have been proposed in the previous discussion, were diverse markers on the cultural map of the Graeco-Roman world. A complete philosophical cartography for the context of the Christian beginnings must include, in addition to further discussion of the Epicurean, Stoic and Sceptic traditions (for which, see Long 1986), a full discussion of the emergence and influence of Hellenistic Platonism (Dillon 1977) – and not only the ideas of these philosophical traditions but their style of expression and argumentation as well as their real practices – the development and use of Stoic technologies of the self in Late antiquity, for example (Foucault 1986). And, in addition to those religious options surveyed above, a complete cartography of religious options during the Graeco-Roman period would include discussions of the introduction into the West of Hellenized rites of such cults as those of the Syrian goddess Atargatis and of the Syrian Jupiter Dolichenus, the introduction into Rome of Asclepius and of the Phrygian 'Great Mother of the Gods', and of the largely neglected influence of Roman religious practices. And the web of 'continuities and antagonisms' between all of these philosophical, religious and religio-philosophical alternatives and those of the early Christianities must be precisely traced. These relationships must include not only those of thought and practice but of mythology and social formation as well. The significance of philosophical claims to truth and those of religion to salvation and redemption, for example, is clear with reference to the cosmological architecture of the Hellenistic world (Martin 1987: 134–7), but what were the social and/or political attractions of such claims? – as surely there must have been. Perhaps the previous overview provides some hint of the richness and complexity of that culture which has so determined the intellectual and religious views of subsequent Western civilization, both in its own right and through the Christian religion to which it gave birth.

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JEWISH TRADITION AND CULTURE



James K. Aitken

Any visitor to Rome up to the present day may gaze on the carved reliefs of the Arch of Titus in the heart of the ancient city, situated on the *Via Sacra* facing the forum. There represented on this triumphal arch, constructed posthumously to celebrate the emperor's victory over the Jews and his apotheosis (cf. Suetonius, *Titus* 1), are symbols of the Jewish Temple (the *menorah*, Torah Scrolls, *shofars* and the table for the shewbread),¹ plundered from the Temple in 70 CE and subsequently brought to Rome (see Figure 4.1).

The relief encapsulates two aspects of Judaism in this period.² It attests to the Jewish resistance to Roman rule that was to repeat itself on several occasions, most notably in 115–18 CE against Trajan in the Diaspora as well as possibly in Palestine, 132–5 CE led by Bar Kochba in Palestine, and finally in 351 CE by Patricius in Palestine. The destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and, following the Bar Kochba revolt, the exclusion of Jews from Aelia Capitolina, the colony founded on the site of Jerusalem by Hadrian, required a consolidation and realignment of some major aspects of religious practice. However, the relief also attests to the prominence of Jews in the Roman empire and beyond. They were important enough to be portrayed on a prominent monument in the very centre of the Roman empire. Their large numbers, estimated at 8 or 9 per cent of the population in the Roman empire alone (Horbury 1991: 40), gave them power and influence, of which some Christians could only be envious (see, e.g., Tertullian *Apologeticum* 18.8; 21.1), and also ensured that they were a force to be reckoned with when in revolt. The large geographical spread of the Jewish communities meant that Jewish life and religion continued and was sustained without serious upheaval following the destruction of the Temple. The consolidation required was eased by the continuance of traditions and religious life in places with well-established Jewish communities outside as well as inside of Palestine.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF JEWISH COMMUNITIES

In what is most probably an exaggeration (see Stern 1974: 119, 122) the first-century Alexandrian writer Philo records the total number of Egyptian Jews alone at



Figure 4.1 Relief on the Arch of Titus in Rome depicting the spoils of the Jerusalem Temple. Photo J. K. Aitken.

one million (*In Flaccum* 43), an excessive figure matched only by the historian Josephus' similar massaging of numbers (e.g. *JW* 2.561; 7.368). Such figures have led scholars earlier this century to estimate the total number of Jews in the Diaspora as running into many millions by the first century AD. Harnack, for example, calculated that there would have been 4 to 4.5 million Jews living in the Roman empire by the first century CE (1908: 4–9); Juster opted for a total of 6 to 7 million (1914: 209–12); while Baron calculated the entire Jewish population to be 8 million (1972: col. 871). The truth is that we can never be certain,³ but both are probably correct to aim at a figure in the several millions, and it is likely that Jews outnumbered Christians in the Roman empire into the fourth century, if not later. The description in Acts 2:5–9 of Jews 'from every nation under heaven', and the listing of the many nations, indicates that Jews were considered at least to be all over the known world in the first century. Philo's figure for Egyptian Jews does indicate that they were a significant proportion of the population in that country, and that they were a comparatively old and established group in both Alexandria and Egypt (for a full history see Modrzejewski 1991). There probably was from ancient times a realization of the 'dispersion', Diaspora (see Septuagint to Deut. 30:4), of Jews across the world, but our sources for their presence in many places for the early centuries

are limited. Outside of Rome, Egypt and Palestine where there were large communities, we must rely on non-literary remains, and especially inscriptions and some synagogue sites. Recent publications and editions of inscriptions (e.g. Horbury and Noy 1992; Noy 1993, 1995) have helped our task, but even then it can be difficult to identify what is Jewish and what is not (and is one of the problems with the study of Trebilco 1991; cf. Kraemer 1991: 141–62). We can deduce much, none the less, of the cultural life and interaction with Christianity for the third to fifth centuries from the art and architecture of synagogues and of the Roman catacombs. It seems that by the first century Jews were spread across the west coast of Italy, Cyrenaica in North Africa, Egypt, Palestine, all of Greece and Asia Minor, in the Bosphorus region on the north of the Black Sea and throughout the Parthian empire in the east. During the following centuries we have traces of them springing up further west, across the north coast of Africa and penetrating further into north and south Italy, France and Spain, as well as moving south into Arabia and Yemen.

Beyond the bounds of the Roman empire there existed large communities of Jews throughout Mesopotamia and Babylonia, a region for which we have greater literary evidence. The Jews in this region seem to have had sustained contact with Christians, and held some political force, stationed as they were under the opponents of the Roman empire and with an interest in Palestine (see Neusner 1965–70, Vol. IV). We should not forget either the large Jewish communities in Syria on the frontier of the empire. These communities are particularly important, being in areas where early Christian communities also arose and where Jews shared a common language of Aramaic (or Syriac in its Christian dialect). Although our knowledge is very limited for this area, we may surmise that there was close and long-standing contact between the two communities there. The close contact between Syrian Christianity and Judaism in Antioch in the second to fourth centuries has already been documented (Fiensy 1985). Certain possibly Jewish elements in the Syrian liturgy (see Gelston 1992: 23) and the tradition of reading two lessons from the Hebrew Bible may be added to this evidence (Jammo 1979: 108; cf. Acts 13:15). Contact and mutual influence may have continued in this region until well into the fourth century, and Fiensy draws attention to Chrysostom's need to preach to the Christians in Antioch (in c. 386 CE) in order to dissuade them from attendance at the synagogue (1985: 215–19). While the Syriac version of the Hebrew Bible, known as the Peshitta, was translated from a Hebrew text, it was, surprisingly, preserved by the Eastern churches alone. And yet it has recently been argued that this ancient Syriac translation was completed in c. 200 CE by a small Jewish community estranged from the rabbinic majority. This community may have eventually embraced Christianity and brought the Peshitta with them (Weitzman 1999). This theory, if correct, would be a further example of the close interaction between Jews and Christians in this area.

Given the broad spread of Jewish communities, it is not possible to write a comprehensive synthesis of tradition and culture without some recognition of diversity. We should, however, be careful not to produce artificial divisions. In his exhaustive study of Jewish symbols in the Graeco-Roman world, Goodenough (1953–68) argued in depth that Diaspora Judaism showed little evidence of the influence of Palestinian Judaism. It displayed a spirituality and mysticism in its

symbolism that was not rooted in the legal material (*halakah*) of Palestine, but had an imaginative content of its own. Goodenough's interpretation, however, of the mystical significance of symbols is generally not accepted today, and the distinction he draws between the Diaspora and Palestine is too simple. Traditions and customs probably varied from town to town and country to country (cf. Rajak and Noy 1993: 75–93), dependent on the local situation, and it is not to be expressed in terms of a Diaspora – Palestine divide. A recent survey of the Mediterranean Diaspora attempts to sketch Jewish identity in the Diaspora (Barclay 1996: 399–444). Whilst it is important to attempt a synthesis, it is perhaps artificial to consider it merely in terms of the Mediterranean Diaspora, rather than the Mediterranean as a whole (including Palestine), or the Roman empire or all Jewish communities together. Amidst the diversity within Judaism certain themes constantly come to the fore as concerns for both Diaspora and Palestinian Jews. This has been succinctly put as 'the Pentateuchally based constitutional ideal of a holy nation governed within the covenant by high priest and king' (Horbury 1998a: 6). The zeal of Judaism before the fall of the Temple (cf. Hengel 1961), not brought out in some syntheses of early Judaism, did not die out afterwards; if anything it may have been heightened. A zealous Judaism with ideals for a holy nation, self-government, and a coming Messiah or divine kingdom in part accounts for the Jewish revolts, the art and images, the liturgical language, the literary production, the contact with non-Jews and the status placed on the patriarch and rabbis. While the diversity and lack of evidence prevent any certain conclusions regarding the impact of Judaism on Christianity, the spirit of Judaism at the time helps us to understand an important aspect of the context of early Christianity.

THE JEWS UNDER ROMAN RULE

The numbers of Jews around the Mediterranean ensured that when they revolted in one country it was of concern to the Roman authorities, especially as it meant that a revolt in one city or region could easily spread to another, as seems to have been the case in the revolts under Trajan of 115–17 CE. The revolts should, however, be seen in broad terms in the context of the Roman empire. One could point to Jewish dissatisfaction with an earthly ruler in place of a theocratic state, and indeed Messianic hopes seemed to have fuelled many of the revolts (see, e.g., Hengel 1961, 1983). But socio-economic factors play an equally important role. It is, therefore, instructive to note the factors that bear on most revolts in the Roman empire. Dyson in particular has demonstrated how native revolts in the Roman empire follow certain forms (1971, 1975), and although he does not discuss the Jewish revolts, they could easily be included within this pattern (see Cohen 1986: 43–4). Revolts usually were instigated both by landless peasants, often forming bands of brigands, and by local aristocracy who had their own grievances against the Romans, whilst heavy Roman taxation causing economic distress for all provided an added incentive. In addition, and of particular moment in any comparison with the Jewish revolts, is the observation that religious 'Messianic' speculation, or at least national aspirations, fuelled native revolts. In 69 CE, at the time of the Jewish revolt in

Judaea, Vespasian was forced to begin his rule as emperor by putting down a revolt that had arisen in Gaul led by Julius Civilis with the support of the Druids. It appears that the Druids, according to the Roman historian Tacitus (*Histories* 4.54.2), predicted the destruction of Rome and the rule of empire falling into the control of Transalpine Gaul (Cohen 1986: 44). Tacitus notes similar aspirations being bandied abroad in the first Jewish revolt against Rome (*Histories* 5.13.2; cf. Josephus, *JW* 6.312–13).

The enduring affect of the first three Jewish revolts against Rome, in addition to the warning they sent regarding the strength of the Jews, was the consequences it had for Jewish political and religious life. The first revolt against Rome (66–72) had the support of both the upper and lower classes of society, each of whom had something to gain. The burden of heavy taxation and poor Roman administration as factors is signalled by the burning of public archives, including money-lenders' bonds, at the start of the war (Josephus, *JW* 2.427). It also appears that by the outbreak of the revolt Jewish society in Palestine had broken down into factional disputes and violence, and that the ruling class had lost any claim to authority in the eyes of the people (Goodman 1987; Price 1992). The defeat of the Jewish forces and the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE ended Jewish political independence and brought to an end the role of the Temple as the religious centre and source of priestly power. From this point the new centre of learning and the base from which a new system of leadership began to grow was Jamnia (Yavneh) to the west of Jerusalem.

Although it is unlikely that the Jews in Palestine participated in the revolts against Rome that arose in various countries in the time of Trajan (115–17), they did revolt once again with disastrous results in 132–5. Little is known of the revolts in 115–17 because of the lack of historical sources, but it seems they began in Egypt or at least in Cyrene and then continued into Egypt (see Smallwood 1981: 389–427) and Cyprus, perhaps motivated by general revolts in Mesopotamia (on which see Barnes 1989: 145–62). Slightly more evidence is available for the years 132–5, thanks to some manuscript and coin finds, although it is still not possible to reconstruct with any certainty the causes and order of events. The revolt appears to have been led by the figure of Bar Kochba ('son of the star'), whose name in rabbinic texts suggests that he was presented by some as a Messianic figure, derived from an interpretation of the star in Num. 24:17 (cf. the Septuagint translation of that verse). We know that Jewish Messianic and some apocalyptic speculation existed at the time (e.g. *Sibylline Oracle* 5), and some of the symbolism on the coins of the period (apparently used as a means of propaganda) could be so interpreted (Meshorer 1982: 138–50). Nevertheless, we cannot say whether he saw himself as a Messiah, or indeed if he actually instigated the revolt or merely became its champion. There had already been unrest in Palestine in the years before the outbreak of the revolt, perhaps accounting for intense road building in 120–30 (Isaac and Oppenheimer 1985: 50–1), and some economic hardship may have been felt by the Jewish peasantry (Applebaum 1976: 15–17), although this is disputed (Mildenberg 1984: 84–94). It is also possible that the emperor Hadrian had planned before the revolt to rebuild Jerusalem as the Hellenistic city Aelia Capitolina (Dio Cassius, *Epitome* 69.12; see Smallwood 1981: 431–4). Whatever Hadrian's precise plans were, after decisively defeating the Jews in Palestine he was able to found Aelia Capitolina.

Jews were officially (if not in practice) excluded from entry into the city, and were not allowed onto the Temple mount up until the fourth century, and even then only on the commemoration day of the destruction of the Temple (Fitzmyer 1971: 352). After 135 the majority of the Jewish population in Palestine lived in Galilee in the north and not Judaea, and consequently the centre of Jewish life moved to there from Jamnia, to Usha (until c. 170), then Beth Shearim and Sepphoris, and eventually from the middle of the third century to Tiberias. It was also at this point that the Roman province was named Syria Palaestina, and from this name we can legitimately call the region Palestine. Another consequence of the revolt was that many people, including rabbis, fled to Babylonia for safety and remained there afterwards. Babylonia had for many centuries had a sizeable Jewish population – since the exile of 586–38 BCE, but this new wave of settlers ensured its establishment as the centre, along with Palestine, of Jewish learning and literary activity.

JAMNIA AND THE RABBIS

It used to be held that the period of putative Jewish self-government in Jamnia following the fall of the Temple was formative for later Judaism, some even speaking of a synod meeting there, on the model of early church synods. The fixing of the Hebrew canon, the exclusion of Christianity from Judaism and the codification of Jewish law were all activities traditionally ascribed to Jamnia. This picture now seems far from satisfactory. From the perspective of someone living at that time, it would not have been clear until after the Bar Kochba revolt that the Temple would not be rebuilt. Tradition has it that Yohanan ben Zakkai was granted permission by Vespasian to establish an academy in the city of Jamnia, a small concession to the Jews (for discussion see Saldarini 1975; Cohen 1984). The group that formed there was probably small and had little influence initially, but it appears that its teachings and decisions eventually became definitive and were incorporated into the foundational literature of the Judaism of this period: rabbinic Judaism. It probably took centuries for rabbinic Judaism as we now know it to become normative, and diversity, reflected in art, literature and language, can be found even in places of rabbinic influence.

Neusner has drawn attention to the fact that the discontinuity from the pre-70 era would not have been felt at Jamnia, but that the real historical break would have been in c. 140 with the re-establishment of the rabbis in the north after the devastation of southern Palestine (1971: III, 282–3). Our sources are primarily the rabbinic documents themselves, which are biased and generally written or compiled much later than the time of which they are writing. They do, nonetheless, attest to the development of this rabbinic Judaism. The title ‘rabbi’ as a specific designation rather than as a polite form of address (as it is used in the Gospels) implies a new consciousness, and this appears to have been an established usage by the second century. A well-known dictum in the *Tosefta* (*Eduy* 3.4) indicates this self-consciousness: ‘He who has students who in turn have students of their own is called a Rabbi. If his students are forgotten, he is called Rabban; if even the students of his students are already forgotten, he is called by his name [alone].’ The rabbinic

literature presents the rabbis as direct inheritors of the wisdom and law imparted to Moses by God at Sinai, and passed on through the chain of Pharisees (Mishnah *Abot* 1). Certainly some of the rabbis had connections with Pharisaism, but it should not be pushed too strongly (Cohen 1984). The study of the Bible and the law contained therein became a central aspect of rabbinic Judaism, as well as the very importance of study itself, in a way that it had not in Pharisaism.

From the second century there arose the office of head of the Palestinian Jewish community, known in Greek as ‘ethnarch’ or ‘patriarch’ and in Hebrew as the *nasi* ‘prince’. The details of the origins and status of the ethnarch are disputed (see Jacobs 1995: 1–9; Hezser 1997: 405–49). It was probably in Galilee that limited Jewish self-government was restored after Bar Kochba and the ethnarch gradually rose to prominence and stature. Perhaps in response to the rise of the ethnarch an exilarchate was also established in the Eastern Diaspora. The ethnarchs seem to have amassed great wealth and privilege, and behaved in a royal fashion, even seeing themselves as descendants of David. Origen in the third century confirms their royal manner, although his report that they tried capital cases may be an exaggeration of this (*Epistles* 1, 14). Such royal aspirations would have befitted the climate of the second century and the hopes of some Jewish circles (see Goodblatt 1984: 113–32). In the manner of the Roman *salutatio* the ethnarch had clients who would pay their daily respects (e.g. *j. Shabbat* 12.3, 13c), whilst the local communities had to pay taxes for his upkeep (*Codex Theodosianus* 16.8.14, 16.8.29). His prime functions appear to have been judicial and legal, and he was assisted in this by a council of advisers. It is therefore appropriate that our first definitive ethnarch in the sources is Judah I (Judah Ha-Nasi) from the beginning of the third century, who is said to be responsible for the compilation of the major Jewish legal work, the Mishnah. The importance of the ethnarch is probably to be seen in the fact that after Bar Kochba there were no more Jewish revolts until the fourth century, and even then there was only one minor revolt and it was not supported by the ethnarch. The authority of the ethnarch coupled with the appointment of high-ranking Roman governors in Palestine allowed for a time of peace and stability.

JEWISH LITERATURE

Whilst the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE was not the end of Jewish religion, and some no doubt considered it merely an interlude until the Temple would be rebuilt, as had happened before, it has left its mark on the literature in a number of ways. In the first place the centre of Jewish literary activity increasingly shifted towards the East and to the population in Babylonia, although northern Palestine remained of equal importance in this respect. These twin centres were responsible for the production from the fifth century onwards of the Hebrew and Aramaic works, the Talmuds (one Palestinian and one Babylonian), and various exegetical commentaries on Scripture (*midrashim*), incorporating ideas that had developed over the centuries. It also led to greater attention being focused on the activities of the synagogue and its role in education. The oral exposition of the Bible in the synagogue was eventually written down in the form of Targumim, whilst paintings and

mosaics depicted the same themes that were being expounded. There seems to have developed at the same time a move towards the compiling and editing of different traditions, perhaps local traditions, and finding a resolution between opposing opinions. This editorial work and the compilation of principally legal traditions found its expression in rabbinic literature.

Rabbinic literature

The one document above all others that came to predominate in Judaism after the Muslim conquest, both in itself and in its application in the Talmuds, was the Mishnah (meaning 'study' or 'oral tradition'). How this text came about, how representative it is of Judaism in the early centuries, and why it became normative are puzzles that none can satisfactorily answer. It is a compilation of legal rulings and sayings, often attributed to rabbis of the first two centuries CE, and tradition has it that it was put together by R. Judah the Prince (Ha-Nasi) in c. 200. It is clear that the Mishnah contains early traditions, but it is no easy task to determine the dates of the various traditions or even to confirm the date for the redaction of the Mishnah as 200 CE. The selection of rulings by different rabbis may represent at times only differing regional traditions as well as actual disputes. Certainly it seems likely that the Mishnah is not representative of all of Palestinian Judaism in the first and second centuries, and some of its key figures (e.g. Hillel and Shammai) play no part in Josephus' historical accounts. The influence of the small group of rabbis named in the Mishnah seems slight in this period, and other traditions (seen in both art and other literature) were followed in Jewish communities. Evidence of a non-rabbinic stream in Judaism can now be seen in the discovery of certain Second Temple texts (the Damascus Document and the Wisdom of Ben Sira) in a medieval synagogue in Cairo (the Cairo Genizah). It seems that these texts, one sectarian and one disapproved of by the rabbis (see *b.Sanhedrin* 100b), indicate that even marginal works were copied and read throughout antiquity.⁴ The legal matters discussed in the Mishnah, including purity, appointed times and the legal position of women, are not to be taken as the sum of interests or world-view of the rabbis concerned (as Neusner 1981b does). Indeed glimpses of theology can be found in some tractates (e.g. Sanders 1990: 319–20). Rather, the Mishnah is a legal text, concentrating on issues on which there is the greatest disagreement. What it omits may be ideas so central to Jewish belief that they do not need mentioning (cf. Sanders 1990: 330). It should not be taken as definitive of Judaism in the time from which it arises.

At some point after the completion of the Mishnah, the *Tosefta* (meaning 'addition, supplement') was compiled. This is a collection of books containing additional legal material to the Mishnah, and it is clear that it is closely related (in time and content) to the Mishnah. That much is evident in its naming of the same rabbis, its corresponding structure and its use of a similar Hebrew combined with occasional Aramaic words and Greek and Latin loan-words (see Stemmerger 1996a: 149–63). Other legal works that were redacted in this period are the *Tannaitic* or *halakic midrashim*, which are exegetical commentaries (*midrashim*) on the biblical books Exodus to Deuteronomy. As the name '*halakic midrashim*' implies they are primarily legal in nature (*halakah* denoting legal observance), but since they are intended as

continuous commentaries they include discussions of the narrative passages in the Pentateuch also, involving anecdotes, tales and non-legal exegesis (*aggadah*). As commentaries on biblical books they emphasize the scriptural basis for their legal rulings, which is in opposition to the Mishnah's derivation of the law (including its very structure of sections; see Lightstone 1983), although it is not always to be seen in polemical terms. Although the rabbis named in these *midrashim* are from the Tannaitic period (i.e. from the first to the beginning of the third century), it seems likely that they were redacted after this period, even if it is not possible to give any certain dating. Quotations in the *midrashim* from the Mishnah and *Tosefta*, even if not precisely those in our extant manuscripts of these works, indicate that the *midrashim* were probably compiled after them (Melammed 1967).

One of the earliest *halakic midrashim* is known as the *Mekhilta* (meaning 'rule') of *Rabbi Ishmael*, comprising a commentary on portions of Exodus 12:1 through to 35:3. Various features suggest that it derives from an early period (Lauterbach 1933: I, xix–xx), although it appears to have undergone a series of redactions. The final stage of redaction cannot be determined, but it is certain that much of the *midrash* cannot be called Tannaitic. Wacholder's argument that the *Mekhilta* was produced in the post-Talmudic period (eighth-century North Africa and Egypt) has been shown to be unsound. The *Mekhilta* in fact preserves the older versions of parallel traditions found in the Talmud and elsewhere (Kahana 1985–6: 515–20), and it seems more likely that if someone had intended to give the impression of an early date (as Wacholder argues), more of the sayings would have been given attributions to Tannaitic rabbis and not be left unattributed (Neusner 1970: xiii–xiv). Stemmerger, on the basis of the rabbis cited and the historical allusions, proposes a date for the final redaction in the second half of the third century (1996a: 254–5). It is an important work as it demonstrates the complexity of the legal tradition in this time, as well as providing many examples of early biblical exegesis, often sharing interpretations with the Aramaic targumim (see pp. 89, 92). Extensive passages discuss features of the biblical text, applying it to contemporary belief, often without reference to legal issues at all. The discussion of Exodus 15, the 'Song of Moses', is a case in point (recorded in tractate *Shirata* of the *Mekhilta*). In that section the *Mekhilta* discusses at length God's role as a warrior, his dominance over earthly powers, his redemptive qualities and the prediction of the destruction of foreign nations. It also draws attention many times to the use of the imperfect verbs in the text, which can be translated with a future sense (as well as a present), and thereby adds a prophetic sense to the words: e.g., '*Thou overthrowest them that rise up against thee* [Exod. 15:7], It is not written *harasta* "Thou hast overthrown," but *tabaros* "Thou wilt overthrow," in the future. For it is said: "Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth, . . ." (Ps. 58:7)' (*Shirata* 6.64–6).⁵ These are themes, typical of apocalyptic literature, that often seem to be lacking in other literature from this period but attest to the zealous nature of Judaism at this time. The *Mekhilta* has, therefore, preserved for us evidence of the breadth of thought and of the variety of streams that continued through this time.

Another type of *midrashim* that is primarily exegetical rather than legal in nature begins to appear in the course of this period. In the first half of the fifth century comments on the biblical text of Genesis were compiled to form what is known as

Genesis Rabbah (= 'great'), a name that perhaps suggests that there was at one time a 'smaller' commentary on Genesis. Probably from the same period comes *Lamentations-Rabbah*, a commentary on the text of Lamentations. In view of the content of the biblical book this commentary contains stories of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE and other times of crisis, including the Bar Kochba revolt and tales of martyrdom. Many of these are fabulous rather than historical.

The Aramaic targumim

As Hebrew began to die out as a spoken language and began to be replaced by Aramaic, the need arose to give a translation into Aramaic of the Scriptures as they were read in the synagogue. This (probably oral) translation was called targum (cf. Ezra 4:7), and the targumim (to use the plural) came to be written down over time, even as early as the first century BC (as attested by a Qumran text of Job; Fitzmyer 1974). They are to be distinguished from the *midrashim* in that they are primarily translations, but they include many interpretative elements (cf. Jesus' exposition of the biblical text in the synagogue according to Luke 4:16–22). The written forms of most of the targumim now extant are very late, but they seem to contain very early traditions (McNamara 1991: 130). This is particularly the case with the Palestinian targumim to the Pentateuch (known as *Neofiti*, *Fragment Targum*, and *Ps.-Jonathan*),⁶ although the official rabbinic Targum (*Onqelos*) from Babylon seems also to have some Palestinian connections. The importance of the targumim as witnesses is that they preserve many non-rabbinic traditions not found in other literature, and they are as important as the rabbinic texts for the study of Jewish biblical exegesis in Christian works (see Hayward 1987: 105–23). We find in the targumim translations, for example, that are expressly censured by rabbinic literature (McNamara 1966: 46–56, 134–8).

Greek literature

The last great Jewish writers in Greek in antiquity were probably the philosopher Philo and the historian Josephus. They both interpret and expound the Greek Bible, Philo particularly reading it in terms of Greek (and especially Stoic) philosophy and Josephus in terms of history. After Josephus we have few Jewish Greek works, generally continuing the Philonic tradition in Jewish thought. It remains a puzzle, however, that hardly any Jewish literature in Greek has survived from after the beginning of the second century, and it raises the question whether this is a matter of chance or indicative that no such literature was ever produced. It would seem unlikely that Jews were not writing literature in Greek, especially since Christian authors, with whom it is clear that they were in contact, were doing so.⁷ Certainly in Jewish literature from this period Hebrew and sometimes Aramaic were considered the sacred languages, Hebrew being described as the language of the sanctuary (*Targum Ps.-Jonathan* to Gen. 42:23 and 45:12) and the language of Creation (Testament of Naphtali 8:3ff.; *Targum Ps.-Jonathan* to Gen. 11:1; *j. Megillah* 1.2). Greek, however, was the prime language of the Roman empire, especially in the East where it had been the long-established lingua franca (see Horrocks 1997: 71–3). It was too

prestigious and too universal for any significant Latinization to be either necessary or desirable (cf. Cicero *Pro Archia* 23). The Roman biographer Suetonius even has the Emperor Claudius remark on a barbarian's command of both Latin and Greek — 'you know both our languages [*utroque sermone nostro*]' (*Claudius* 42.2). A recent study has also shown that the Greek employed by Jews in Rome at least did not differ from that used by pagans or Christians (Rutgers 1995), even if the translation of the Bible sanctioned for Jews was that by Aquila with its 'slavish literalism' (Simon 1986: 299).

We do find in the Babylonian Talmud an indication that Greek was held in special regard by some Jews since, in an interpretation based on Gen. 9:27, certain rabbis declare that the language of Japhet (i.e. Greek) 'is to be found in the tents of Shem' (*b. Megillah* 9b and cf. *j. Megillah* 1.71c; see Lévinas 1984: 331–69). Furthermore, it should be borne in mind that the biblical book Ecclesiastes was not translated into Greek until the second century and the Song of Songs may not have been translated for up to another two centuries after that, if our analysis of its linguistic features is correct. We cannot be sure of the reason why these books were translated so much later than the rest of the Bible (mostly translated from the third to the first centuries BCE). Perhaps they were not used liturgically in Greek-speaking communities until this time. Greek appears to have remained the main language of Jewish worship and preaching in Rome long after the establishment of the empire (Simon 1986: 295–301). Even the Mishnah allows for the liturgical prayers, the *Shema* and *Eighteen Benedictions*, to be recited in Greek, and from the period of the sixth century Justinian authorized the reading in synagogues of the Greek version of Aquila (*Novella* 146), which shows that Greek was used by some in the liturgy as late as that. The late translation of these biblical books suggests that there was a desire to have the books in Greek and perhaps the need for literature in Greek. There probably was other Jewish literature in Greek in this period, but the dominance of the rabbinic tradition has prevented its preservation. We have already seen that non-rabbinic texts have by chance been preserved in the Cairo Genizah, substantiating the claim that texts were in use even if they had been disapproved of by the rabbis. Further evidence from the Cairo Genizah comes in the form of Greek texts themselves (albeit in some instances only glosses in Greek), often written in Hebrew characters, including a translation into Greek of Ecclesiastes, based on the (Jewish) version of Aquila (de Lange 1996; all the manuscripts date from the tenth to twelfth centuries).

No simple distinction should be drawn between Greek and rabbinic thought as a means of accounting for the loss of Greek literature. Bowersock has rightly distinguished between Hellenism proper and Hellenization, the latter being 'a modern idea, reflecting modern forms of cultural domination' (1990: xi). There does not seem to have been any great divide in antiquity between Jewish and Greek thought and, just as caution should be exercised in distinguishing the Diaspora from Palestine, so too with rabbinic from Greek thought. Greek enabled writers to express themselves more articulately, whether they were Jewish or not. Both Jewish Greek writers and the rabbis were concerned with the exposition of the Bible and its law, containing both prophetic hopes and religious requirements. The rabbinic literature indeed is suffused with Hellenic culture, visible in its mode of argumentation, its

thought and its very vocabulary (see especially Schäfer 1998: 1–3). The Greek age should probably, therefore, be seen as extending as far as the Arab conquest (Kamesar 1990: 576–7; de Lange 1998–9: 23), and in that the rabbinic literature is a part. The rabbinic literature is as much a part of Greek culture as Philo or Origen; our only loss is that we do not have the truly Greek literature that Jews may well have written at that time.

Apocalyptic literature

The defeat of the Jews in the revolt of 66–72, and the loss of the Jerusalem Temple, were felt by many to be a major religious catastrophe and they sought theological expression in the writing of apocalypses (e.g. the New Testament book of Revelation). The apocalypse of Ezra (4 Ezra) was probably composed towards the end of the first century, the writer himself declaring that the vision came in the thirteenth year after the destruction of Jerusalem (3.1). This apocalypse was probably originally written in Hebrew but is now extant only in Latin and Syriac translations. It appears to be dependent on a slightly earlier work (according to Bogaert 1969), the Apocalypse of Baruch (or 2 Baruch), which also was no doubt composed in Hebrew but is now preserved only in Syriac. Both works are concerned with the question of theodicy and believe that God will shortly intervene (Esler 1995), destroying the Roman empire and bringing to an end the reign of the victorious conqueror, portrayed as an ‘eagle’ in 4 Ezra (11–12). This will be followed by a temporary Messianic age and then the creation of a new heaven and a new earth (see Stone 1989). It is possible that 2 Baruch, as argued by Murphy (1985), opposes any form of armed resistance to Rome, conceding the struggle to God alone, which would be in opposition to those who continued to resist until the time of Bar Kochba.

One feature of 4 Ezra’s eschatology is the role of the law as a guarantor of God’s mercy in the future and the continuance of the life and religion of the Jewish people (7.36–8, 70–4, 79–101). Although this could be seen as ‘pivotal’ in the development of Judaism after 70 under the influence of the Mishnah (Esler 1994: 125–8), it is questionable whether it is correct to see 4 Ezra as the last of the Jewish apocalypses and as pointing the way towards a legal rabbinic Judaism. It is true that 4 Ezra is related in certain exegetical and theological themes with rabbinic literature (Stone 1990: 38–9). It is also true that the mode of expression and the message of the Mishnah is utterly different from these first-century apocalypses. Neusner, for example, draws attention to how remarkable is ‘the Mishnah’s utter silence on these tremendous issues of suffering and atonement, catastrophe and apocalypse, expressed with such power [in the apocalypses]’ (1981b: 37). It has already been seen, however, that the Mishnah should not be taken as representative of all of Jewish thought in this period, especially considering how many uncertainties exist over its origins. There appears to have been a resurgence of the writing of Jewish apocalyptic after 500 CE, and from then to the medieval period we have many examples of the genre, including the *Book of Zerubbabel*, the *Prayer of R. Simeon b. Yohai* and 3 *Enoch* (Alexander 1990: 197–218; Treballe Barrera 1998: 448–50). The connection between such works and the classical apocalypses is uncertain. Although it is possible that Christian apocalyptic was the mediator from which Judaism drew

its inspiration for these late apocalypses, it is more likely that there was a direct line of continuity from the ancient to the medieval period that has been obscured in our sources in Late antiquity. Once again the Aramaic targumim provide partial evidence for this for in them we find two apocalyptic passages that have been composed in a similar manner to their first-century counterparts. The targum to Lam. 4:21–2 describes the Parthians devastating Rome, which implies that this text dates from a tradition before 224 CE, when the Parthian empire came to an end. And in *Targum Ps.-Jonathan* to Num. 24:19–24 there is a triumphant declaration of the destruction of Rome and Constantinople, perhaps originating as an apocalypse on the destruction of Rome, to which were added references to Constantinople. These passages recall the early medieval apocalyptic texts but may well date from the time when it is often believed that Jewish apocalypses did not exist. Furthermore, we have already seen that the *Mekhilta*, which probably dates from the third century, contains many of the themes that Neusner says are expressed with such power in the apocalypses. One need only read a passage such as tractate *Shirata* 4:19–29, commenting on Exod. 15:3 ('The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is his name') to gain a taste of these ideas.

One may ask whether Christian interpretation of Jewish apocalypses may help us to reconstruct something of the Jewish understanding towards apocalypses in this period. Frankfurter has, for example, speculated regarding the relationship between Jewish apocalypses and heretical Christian groups, the gnostics on the one hand and wise men and sages on the other (1996: 196–8). If apocalypses were particularly associated with sectarian groups, this may in part account for its lack of prominence in Jewish thought at the time. Scholem, who saw some of the roots of the Jewish mystical tradition in the ancient apocalypses, felt that apocalyptic was greatly reduced, preserved as part of an esoteric movement, but that with the eventual acceptance of Messianism apocalyptic movements were able to resurge (1961: 73–5). Whatever the real explanation is, Judaism never lost hope in the power of God to intervene and restore the former kingdom in Jerusalem. Such beliefs are encapsulated in the targum translation to Isaiah (Chilton 1982), perhaps dating from the early second century, and in the *Eighteen Benedictions*, the most important prayer in Jewish liturgy. The detailed prescriptions for the Temple services and priestly duties contained within the Mishnah may also have been preserved because of a strong belief in an immanent reversal of the present situation. Even if there was no specific apocalyptic genre, apocalyptic beliefs and expressions continued to be uttered.

PROSELYTES AND GODFEARERS

The position of proselytes and godfearers and what they may tell us of Judaism in antiquity are greatly disputed issues. It seems that the large number of Jews by the first century denotes a rapid growth since the early post-exilic period when there may only have been 150,000 in total (Baron 1972: cols 869–70), and it has to be accounted for by factors greater than Goodman's reference to Jewish 'opposition to abortion, infanticide, and contraception' (1994: 84; cf. Tacitus *Histories* 5.5). It seems likely that there was some form of mission or promulgation of the attractive

elements in Judaism, even if not universally practised (Carleton Paget 1996: 65–103, esp. 82–3). Many have assumed that there was active Jewish proselytism in the Second Temple period (e.g. Feldman 1993, with bibliography on pp. 555–6), whilst others have suggested it only came about in the second and third centuries CE (e.g. Goodman 1994: 122–4, who presents it as a response to Christianity), or that it never existed at all (Will and Orrieux 1992). There is no precise missionary strategy evident and many texts do not appear to be interested in the question, but that does not mean that some Jewish circles did not seek converts. Jewish disapproval of gentile idolatry (e.g. Wisdom of Solomon 13–15), Jewish-Greek literature extolling Jewish virtues (e.g. *Letter of Aristaeas*), and the openness to proselytes expressed in some works (e.g. *Eighteen Benedictions* no. 13; 2 Baruch 41.4–6 and 42.3) imply, although do not conclusively prove, a proselytic mission amongst Jews from early on (see Carleton Paget 1996: 83–7). Jewish zeal for their religion would have reinforced or encouraged a missionary intent.

One piece of evidence for the adoption of Jewish practices by non-Jews is the existence of a group, if it even did exist (Feldman 1993: 342–3 is sceptical), known as ‘Godfearers’. Certainly such a group seems to have existed by the third century (or maybe fourth; see Botermann 1993: 184–94) in Aphrodisias (Reynolds and Tannenbaum 1987), but before that the term is used rather inconsistently in the book of Acts (e.g. 10:1–2; 13:16, 26, 43, 50) and is applied by Josephus to both Jews and gentiles (*JA* 7.130, 12.285; *Against Apion* 2.140). It is possible that there were sympathizers, who followed Jewish religious practice without full conversion to Judaism. Circumcision as a requirement may have been one obstacle preventing conversion. Although many have pointed to the lack of evidence for such groups (e.g. Kraabel 1981: 113–26), in the context of the ancient Mediterranean where many were cautious to appease any gods of the locality or gods whom they may have neglected (cf. the altar to an unknown god in Acts 17:23) Gentile adherents to Judaism is a possibility. Their presence, however we understand it, would have required some accommodation by Jews, and that accommodation is one step towards the acceptance of proselytes.

Goodman’s willingness to see Jewish proselytism from the second to third centuries onwards may be supported by evidence found in the targumim. Abraham’s calling upon the name of God at Beer-Sheba (Gen. 21:33) was an opportunity for the targumists to speak of conversion to Judaism. Philo (e.g. *de Plant.* 73–89) and Josephus (*JA* 1.207–12) in the first century are at pains to present Abraham as merely a convert to the worship of the One God and not as seeking to convert others (Hayward 1998: 29–31). All the Palestinian targumic translations of the Pentateuch on Gen. 21:33 present Abraham informing strangers about the God of Israel (Hayward 1998: 31–6). One of them (*Ps.-Jonathan*) is more educative than missionary in intent, presenting him as a preacher. This may be tentatively dated to the second or third centuries CE, when Christian preaching was in the ascendant and permeating all areas of society. Others (*Targum Neofiti*, its glosses and the *Fragment Targums*) share traditions with the Talmud and Midrash and present Abraham as a proselytizer, associating Abraham’s preaching at Beer-Sheba with the observance of worship and prayer. These traditions seem to be no earlier than the fourth century and suggest that synagogues of the time that used these targumim (which ones and

where we cannot say) took great interest in the matter of proselytes (Hayward 1998: 37). Synagogues may not have been missionary institutions as such (McKnight 1991: 62–6, contra Georgi 1987: 88–9), but the activity in them and the preaching may have been used to draw attention to the religion (cf. Carleton Paget 1996: 84, n. 78). Philo even says that on the Sabbath the synagogue ‘stands wide open’ (Philo *de Specialibus Legibus* 2:62–3; cf. later Jerome and John Chrysostom). As we shall see, their magnificence, size and decoration would have further drawn attention to Judaism. It may be significant that from the period when Goodman sees the appearance of proselytism there also developed a tradition of Jewish pictorial art and the finest examples of ancient synagogues begin to be found.

SYNAGOGUES AND SERVICES

The precise historical origins of the synagogue are lost to us, but certainly by the time of the fall of the Second Temple it had become an established institution throughout the Diaspora, and with the loss of the Temple stimulus would have been given in Palestine to develop its use into a place of worship and to replace the older ‘prayer houses’ (*proseuchai*) there. Some synagogues were clearly very impressive structures. The destroyed synagogue/basilica in Alexandria was lauded by the Babylonian Talmud (*Sukkah* 51b), ‘He who has never seen the double colonnade of Alexandria has never seen the glory of Israel in his life’, and such claims can now be substantiated by the excavation of synagogues in the Diaspora. The synagogue at Sardis, in what is now western Turkey, dating from the second or third century and destroyed in 616, is perhaps the largest that we have surviving (see Figure 4.2). Measuring over 90 metres in length, it appears to have had a different use as a public building before being converted into a synagogue.

Synagogues were used as assembly halls for the local communities so that it was necessary for them to be of a suitable size, and their architectural plan was generally modelled on Graeco-Roman meeting halls, large areas divided by supporting columns and benches along the sides. The Galilean synagogue at Hammath-Tiberias, with its rich mosaic floor, was also probably a magnificent building (see Figure 4.3), whilst that of the Roman harbour at Ostia displays the elegance of first century design.

There is no consistent plan for a synagogue design, and great variety in architecture and style exists across the Mediterranean. Kraabel has argued that such synagogues had a social purpose in a Graeco-Roman context in providing an architectural symbol of the community, a form of social cohesion in the manner of voluntary associations (1987: 49–54). Certainly the size and splendour of some of the buildings denoted the prominence of Jews in these locales, and the designs were probably eclectic, drawing upon various local and traditional influences. Evidence from inscriptions suggests that the organization and structures of authority of synagogues varied considerably from place to place (Rajak and Noy 1993: 75–93), and although attempts have been made to see church structure as deriving from the synagogue (e.g. Burtchaell 1992) the variation does not allow for any certainty on this. Christianity can at least be said to partake of the same cultural tradition,



Figure 4.2 The synagogue forecourt and public fountain in Sardis, with a view into the large main sanctuary. Photo J. J. Meggitt.

embodied in elaborate buildings and decoration, prayers and scripture readings, and the presence of gentile adherents.

Synagogues and art

The development of Jewish iconographic art from the third century seems to have centred on the synagogue, although it is not restricted to it. Neusner emphasizes the novelty of such art in a religion that disapproved of graven images as being contrary to the Second Commandment (Exod. 20:4–5). He identifies its roots in the Diaspora, but notes that it later appeared in synagogues in Palestine, such as at Beth-Alpha (Neusner 1981a: 7–17). Biblical themes were often depicted in the art, sometimes sharing motifs from interpretations in rabbinic and targumic texts, and often the same stories recurred in different places (e.g. the sacrifice of Isaac). Christian art was probably dependent on Jewish art, basing much of its representation as it does also on Old Testament scenes. Some of the finest examples of Jewish artwork are the frescoes on the walls of the synagogue of Dura-Europos on the Euphrates (see Figure 4.4) and in the Roman catacombs. But not all the representations were religious.



Figure 4.3 The synagogue at Hammath-Tiberias. Photo G. I. Davies.

Having no tradition of figurative art, the Jews naturally drew upon the art of their surrounding cultures and especially Hellenic art (cf. the art in the tombs of Beth Shearim in Jerusalem). One striking example of this is the appearance of the signs of the zodiac in four synagogues in Palestine, ranging in date from the fourth to the sixth centuries: at Hammath-Tiberias (see Figure 4.5), Beth-Alpha, Huseifa and Na'aran. Evidence of the use of the zodiac can also be found at Susiya and En Gedi. This pagan depiction of the calendar was adopted by Jews, and particularly displayed in synagogues, to represent the annual cycle of festivals. The decorative had also become symbolic (Hachlili 1977: 61–77).

Amongst the various motifs and objects that are depicted in the art, symbols of particular importance in Judaism frequently appear. The Ark for the scrolls, the *menorah* (seven-branched candlestick; see Figure 4.6), ritual utensils (e.g. incense shovel) and festival items (e.g. the *lulav* and *ethrog* from the Feast of Tabernacles; see Figure 4.6). These are obvious symbols for the synagogue, and a reminder of some of the elements of the festivals that would have been celebrated there. And yet, did they have a wider significance? The presence of the menorah and ritual items from tabernacles in non-synagogue art, such as in the catacombs in Rome and the funerary art of Beth Shearim (third to fourth centuries) may imply that they became more than simply symbols of Judaism, although the evidence is slight. The Ark is often portrayed in the architectural style of Roman buildings, and yet with its grand design and curtain it recalls the Jerusalem Temple, as does the incense shovel at a time when incense was not used. A Syrian inscription from the end of the fourth century indicates that the synagogue could even be called *naos* 'Temple' (Horbury



Figure 4.4 The seat of Moses in the synagogue at Dura-Europos. Painted above it are the ark of the scrolls in the centre, various symbols to the left and a depiction of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac on the right. From Wischnitzer (1948) by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

1991: 42). Even the symbols of the festivals that they would have been celebrating may have been there to remind them of the greater grandeur of the celebration in the Temple that they had now lost. Such reminders are found indeed in the fifth-century liturgy for the Day of Atonement (of Yose ben Yose; see Horbury 1981: 150, 166–72). The symbols are another aspect of that zeal for the restoration of the Temple and kingdom in Jerusalem. That the symbols chosen are those of the Feast of Tabernacles may be important if it is borne in mind that that feast had particular connotations of redemption (Loewe 1981: 341–86). So too had Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, since Isaac was actually spared, and this accounts for the repeated use of that story. In rabbinic tradition the setting of that story was located on the Temple mount (e.g. *Sifre Deut.* 28; *Genesis Rabbah* 55:7), the place of redemption, and hence this motif may also be consistent with the aspirations of Jews of the time.

Liturgy

Increasing caution has grown over deriving Christian liturgical practices from Jewish, and this has been strengthened by doubt amongst specialists of Jewish liturgy as



Figure 4.5 The zodiac mosaic of the synagogue at Hammath-Tiberias. Photo G. I. Davies.

to how much we may reconstruct of it. The earliest Jewish prayer books, compiled to answer liturgical disputes, date only from the ninth and tenth centuries (Hoffman 1979: 5). Attempts to reconstruct early liturgical texts through analysis of variants in manuscripts and issues of dispute in rabbinic texts (e.g. Elbogen 1931; Finkelstein 1925–6) are beset with problems of method, including the assumptions that the prayers were from the start fixed literary creations and that the rabbis are debating the same texts as those preserved in the medieval period (Hoffman 1979: 4). Heinemann's approach (1977) is to analyse the forms and contents of prayers, from which he concludes with some justification that Jewish prayer, whilst sharing certain common themes and forms, varied considerably up until the Geonic period (eighth to eleventh centuries). The role of Jamnia after the fall of the Temple may also have a bearing on this question (see, e.g., Zeitlin 1963–4). Fleischer has surveyed the evidence and concluded that obligatory prayer was an innovation of Gamaliel II towards the end of the first century CE (1990: 397–441 and 1991: 683–8; and in response Reif 1991: 677–81). He sees the loss of the Temple and the period in Jamnia as determinative for the development of Jewish prayer. We have already had reason to question how influential the Jamnia period was, and Fleischer's position does not take into account the wide distribution of Jewish communities outside Palestine, for whom the Temple would not have been their primary focus. There is also evidence for the themes and forms of later Jewish prayer from the time



Figure 4.6 Three *menoroth*, with *lulav* and *ethrog* beneath, on a synagogue column from Corinth.
Photo G. I. Davies.

of the Second Temple (Falk 1998: esp. 236–51). Institutionalized prayer (cf. Luke 11:1) and forms of prayer (Luke 11:2–4; Matt. 6:9–13) are attested in Christian writings (Falk 1998: 250; Horbury 1998b: 305–6). The Christian evidence does imply that there was some borrowing from set Jewish forms (e.g. 1 *Clement* 34:7; *Didache* 10), but we cannot be sure precisely what the form and wording were.⁸

One of the most important Jewish prayers (see *m.Berakhot* 3.3, 4.1) was and still remains the *Eighteen Benedictions* (or *Amidah*), whose themes seem to date back to before the fall of the Temple (Elbogen 1931: 29; cf. Ecclesiasticus 36:1–17 and 2 Macc. 1:27–9). This prayer continues the zeal of Judaism into the rabbinic period, especially with its urgent call for the return and redemption in its central portions (*Eighteen Benedictions* 10–14). Gamaliel II is said to have finalized its form (*m.Berakhot* 4:3; *b.Berakhot* 28b), but this too may be an exaggeration of his role in the liturgy. Certainly in his time an emphasis on national unity and hope following the destruction of the Temple would have been themes that were gladly inherited by some rabbis from the time before 70 CE (Horbury 1998a: 7). As we shall see, this prayer also has important information to tell us on the attitude towards Christians in the early rabbinic period (see pp. 101–102).

THE BIBLE AND ITS INTERPRETATION

By the end of the Second Temple Period there was already an acknowledgement of a collection of important books in Judaism that paved the way for a canon. A fixed number of books is presupposed in Josephus and 2 Esdras, and probably also in *Jubilees* (second century BCE), and as early as the prologue to the Greek translation of Ecclesiasticus in the second century BCE one could speak of 'the Law, the prophets and other writings', words prefiguring the rabbinic division of the Hebrew Bible. It is likely that Christians had respect for the Jewish 'scriptures' (1 Cor. 15:3–4), as much as Jews had. R. Aqiba is said to have called the Song of Songs 'The holy of holies' (*m. Yadayim* 3.5), indicating deep respect for even those writings that do not fall under the categories of 'Law' or 'Prophets'.

The translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek (the Septuagint) had begun in the third century BCE, and most of it was probably completed by the time of the rise of Christianity, although Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs may not have been translated until much later. The Septuagint translation of the Pentateuch itself can be said to be one of the earliest extant Jewish biblical interpretations, reflecting methods of exegesis employed by the Palestinian rabbinic schools (Schaper 1995: 16–25). Josephus also, in his *Jewish Antiquities* (*Liber Antiquitatum*), a reworking of biblical history, displays similar methods. The translation into Greek of the Bible provided a text in a common language for exegesis and disputation for both Jews and Christians. Hengel has shown how the Septuagint was used as much by Jews as Christians in Rome (1994: 182–284), and Horbury has extended this argument to cover the rest of the Mediterranean, indicating that it should not be seen purely as a Christian text (1998a: 29–33; cf. Veltri 1994). But equally important was the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic, the targum, which provided an extensive interpretation of the biblical text in a language shared by many Jews and Christians, most notably in the East, and reflecting Jewish exegesis in many circles. Stemberger has emphasized the disproportion of Jewish to Christian biblical interpretations and the differences between the different texts used (1996b: 569–86). His interest, however, is on rabbinic commentaries, but when one considers the Aramaic targum on, for example, the prophets, we find there a wealth of comments in proportion to Christian commentaries on these books, even if there is a lack of Jewish *midrashim* on them (Horbury 1998a: 26–7).

Christian scholars were often reliant on Jewish evidence for the biblical text, since they were for the most part unable to read the Hebrew original, and they had to take into account Jewish revisions of the Septuagint, including that attributed to Aquila. Two Christian scholars who were able to stand out by their own knowledge of the biblical text, but who were at the same time greatly indebted to Jewish interpretation, were Origen (see de Lange 1976; also Chapter 39 in this volume) and Jerome (see Chapter 46 of this volume). Although it has been proposed that Jerome's approach to the biblical text was original in its use of Greek and Latin philology (Kamesar 1993: 76–81; 174–5, 189–94), Jerome himself expresses his originality ('*opus novum*') probably because of his use of Jewish interpretative traditions (Hayward 1995: 7–14). He seems to have had a good knowledge of Hebrew, which he used to criticize the Septuagint text in his *Hebrew Questions*, and despite being an

innovator he claimed that he had many Christian predecessors in his adoption of Hebrew tradition (*Apology against Rufinus* 1.13, 2.34). It appears that he was in particular reliant on targumic tradition, suggesting that his main source was either a person whose duties involved translation for the synagogue or an actual written text (Hayward 1987 and 1990: 71). None the less, Jerome's motivation was theological, and he felt a Christian was a better translator of the Hebrew text than the original Septuagint translators, for whom the fulfilment of the prophecies had not yet become a reality (Kamin 1991: 248–51).

CONTACT AND CONTROVERSY

It has come to be recognized that there was close contact between the early Christian and Jewish communities. No longer can we hold with Harnack (1883: 63) that anti-Jewish polemic in Christian writings was a literary genre rather than the result of real encounter, or with Freimann (1911: 561) that the Jews referred to are Hellenized Jews who know nothing of Pharisaic interpretation (see Krauss 1996: 28–9). The image of the Jew in Christian writings is varied, ranging from stereotypic to a more genuine perception, forming a part of Christian self-perception as well as informing on the contemporary Jewish situation (Lieu 1996). In Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, from a time (c. 155) when there were still many Jews in the Christian body (*Dialogue with Trypho* 47.3), there appears a genuine Jewish propaganda against Christians and a knowledge of Jewish and Christian Messianism (Lieu 1996: 101–50; Horbury 1998a: 25). It is known that Christians attended synagogue as well as church services, whilst others adopted Judaism. We have already had recourse to the sermons of Chrysostom against Judaizers in Antioch, which indicate that even under Constantine the close contact continued. The Jewish criticism of Jesus as a deceiver and magician (cf. Origen *Against Celsus* 1.28, 32; *b.Sanhedrin* 43a) was used as a tool in the disputations. Whilst there was evidently close cooperation between individual Jews and Christians, apparent in the shared biblical interpretations, in the literature they present each other as hostile groups.

Once again Jewish zeal for their religion is evident in their view of Christianity. They were equally zealous in their treatment of the Samaritans (cf. *Targum Ps.-Jonathan* on Genesis 35), and this hostility would have been exacerbated by the Samaritan religious revival in the fourth century (MacDonald 1964: 36–40). One aspect of their zeal is found in the *Eighteen Benedictions*, where the twelfth benediction contains a curse on heretics (*minim*). This has been shown to be intimately connected with the theme of redemption in the prayer and the desire for a unified, pure nation (Horbury 1998a: 8). It is disputed when this denunciation of heretics was actually applied to Christians (the medieval Palestinian, but not the Babylonian, manuscripts actually name the '*notzerim*') – opinions ranging over centuries – but the mood and content is fitting for Judaism as early as the first century. Horbury indicates that by the time of Justin Martyr in the second century Christians were probably envisaged (1998b: 306). Certainly a spirit of exclusivism and opposition to heretics or sinners was a part of Judaism from the time of the rise of Christianity,

and with similar Messianic hopes and longing for redemption it was natural for Christianity to adopt this spirit.

JULIAN AND THE JERUSALEM TEMPLE

With the Christianization of the Roman empire under Constantine life for Jews was to change, if at first gradually. In September 324 Constantine's defeat of Licinius, Emperor of the East, placed him as ruler of Palestine. This allowed him to reinforce existing measures, which, although being little more than had existed previously, may have caused some discontent amongst Jews since the practice of them had probably lapsed (Avi-Yonah 1976: 162–74). Constantine, however, was a diplomat and his opposition to Judaism expressed in his letters to church authorities did not manifest too strongly in his treatment of Jews. His successor, Constantius (337–61) was not so wise, passing laws (*Codex Theodosianus* 16 8:1, 6; 9:2) that, although apparently consistent with Roman practice, may actually have caused financial hardship to Jews and loss of trade. From the revolt of Bar Kochba in 135 to the year 351 there had been no Jewish revolts, but in 351, perhaps as a consequence of these laws, an attempt seems to have been made to restore the kingdom under one Patricius (recorded by the historian Sextus Aurelius Victor, *Liber de Caesaribus* 42.9–12). Constantius was busy with a revolt in Gaul at the time, and the governor of the East, Gallus Caesar, was an incompetent ruler. Support from Persia for the Jews may also have incited matters further. Little is known of the details of the revolt, except that it was concentrated in Galilee and the coastal plain (perhaps the areas of manufacturing industries), but the attempt was short-lived and significantly the patriarch and authorities remained loyal to Rome.

One consequence of the revolt against Gallus may have been an acknowledgement of the need to appease the Jews in some quarters. This appeasement nearly came from the unlikely source of the emperor Julian (361–3), the Hellene trained in neo-Platonism at Athens. Ammianus Marcellinus (*History* 23.1, 2) records that Julian, as he was preparing a campaign against Persia, planned the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple, but that this venture was halted by miraculous balls of fire bursting from the foundations, an incident that appears from other sources (e.g. Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 10.39–40) to have been an earthquake (for the sources, see Levenson 1990: 261–79). Although rabbinic sources are surprisingly silent on this matter, it need not be doubted. The support of the Jews of Palestine would have been important for Julian's campaign against Persia, especially if some Jews were pro-Persian. It would also have been consistent with his Hellenic beliefs that each religion should be able to offer its own sacrifices, and Hellenic pagans seem to have assisted in the undertaking even though some had suffered in the revolt against Gallus. This was the beginning of friendly relations between Jews and pagans that persisted for some time (Avi-Yonah 1976: 198). It should, however, also be seen in the context of Julian's opposition to Christianity, since the destruction of the Temple had been taken for centuries as a sign of the truth of Christianity (Avi-Yonah 1976: 192–3). Julian reacted against the Christian stance of his predecessors by promoting the very religion that could 'disprove' the truth of the gospel. The political strength that the

Temple would have given to the Palestinian Jews against the Christian bishops may also have been a factor and accounts for the rise in the status of the patriarch at this time.

THE END OF THE PATRIARCHATE

It may have been Julian who bestowed on the ethnarch/patriarch the lofty honorary title of *praefectus praetorio*, an acknowledgement of his status in conjunction with other grand titles that accrued to the office in this period (*Codex Theodosianus* 16 8:8, 11, 13, 15). Certainly there appears to have been a rise in the status of the ethnarch in the fourth century. Levine suggests that it should be seen in the context of the rise in the power of bishops at this time, and a consequent desire on the part of the emperor to counter ecclesiastical authorities (1996: 32). This would be in accord with the motives for Julian's attempt to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple. Whatever the reason for the increase in status, the honorary title was cancelled in 415 by emperor Theodosius II and in 429 a law speaks of the 'ending of the patriarchate' (*Codex Theodosianus* 16 8:22, 29). We do not know the reasons why the patriarchate ceased. Perhaps Theodosius refused to recognize a successor to the last patriarch and the office simply died out rather than actually being abrogated. One suggestion is that it was abolished as a result of a Jewish revolt in 418 (see Levine 1996: 32, n. 161). In the Eastern Diaspora the exilarchate was probably also abolished some time after this, and until the Arab conquerors took over the region in the seventh century the Jews lived in difficult times. But the heritage of the first five centuries ensured a strong cultural and intellectual life for their descendants, and paved the way for great works such as the Talmud, leaving a resilient religious tradition to survive the demands of the changing political and religious environment that was ahead.⁹

NOTES

- 1 The precise identification of the items on the Arch is problematic and is discussed in detail by Yarden (1991).
- 2 I will continue to use the expressions 'Jew', 'Jewish' and 'Judaism' in this chapter, since I am unconvinced by the arguments in favour of their replacement by 'Judaean' and 'Judaeanism' discussed by David Horrell at the start of Chapter 6 in this volume.
- 3 McKnight (forthcoming) argues that all these figures are little more than guesswork and that there is no scientific method for ancient demography. None the less, even with his caution he himself estimates the first-century Jewish population to be approximately 6 million.
- 4 It has often been suggested that the texts suddenly appear in the Cairo Genizah because the manuscripts were found in caves in a similar manner to the modern discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls. Despite some ancient reports of manuscript finds, this hypothesis is unlikely, and instead the preservation of the manuscripts fits the evidence better (see Schur 1992: 15–16).
- 5 This translation is taken from Lauterbach (1933: II, 47). The Hebrew text edition that he publishes contains many differences from that of Rabin (1960), indicating the com-

plex manuscript history of the text, but the differences are not so great as to detract from the point being made here.

- 6 A particular problem prevails in the case of *Ps.-Jonatban*, some dating it as late as the time of the Crusaders. A long exchange has been proceeding between C. T. R. Hayward and A. Shinan on the relationship between *Ps.-Jonatban* and *Pirque de-rabbi Eliezer*, and consequently the targum's date in relation to that late document. A bibliography of this exchange is given in Hayward (1992: 9, nn. 1–2).
- 7 There is also a lack of Jewish Latin writings, rendering the study of Jewish–Christian relations in Western Christianity more difficult. In a similar way to the argument here for the existence of Jewish Greek writers, Rutgers (1995: 210–59) argues for an active Jewish Latin community in Rome.
- 8 Fleischer (1990: 435 and n. 96) dismisses the Christian evidence, arguing that Christian prayer was actually standardized earlier than the Jewish; but this seems unlikely.
- 9 The writer would like to thank Professor William Horbury and Dr James Carleton Paget for advice, and Claire Harris for bibliographic information.

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PART II

CHRISTIAN ORIGINS
AND DEVELOPMENT



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THE GALILEAN WORLD OF JESUS



Seán Freyne

Many observers of the current ‘third wave’ of historical Jesus research are convinced that it too is theologically motivated, even when the concerns that are operative today are very different from those which drove the original quest in the last century. In a post-Marx and post-Freud world the focus of attention is no longer a search for Jesus’ universal moral ideals according to the Hegelian conceptions of history, but rather on the particularity of Jesus’ engagement with the social structures of his own immediate world and the cultural ethos that shaped his responses to it. Suddenly, Galilee has become centre stage in terms of Jesus’ ministry, and inevitably the assumptions about its ethos have varied considerably from one writer to another. Indeed, so great has been the attention to Galilee in some recent studies that the one most historically secure event in his life, namely, that he was crucified in Jerusalem under the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, has been virtually lost sight of. In some accounts Jesus’ denouement in Jerusalem is treated either as an accidental happening or the result of a one-off visit to the Judaeian religious centre.

The turn to the particularity of Jesus’ ministry is certainly timely and important, yet it does immediately raise the question: which world or worlds should we be talking about? The narratives of the Synoptic gospels, while locating the public ministry in Galilee, have Jesus journey to Jerusalem by divine necessity, thus associating the region with the centre in terms of religious affiliation and loyalties. Yet, the earliest of these, Mark’s, does not restrict Jesus’ movements in the north to political Galilee, but reports him as journeying in the direction of Tyre, the Dekapolis and Caesarea Philippi, well outside the boundaries of the province as described by Josephus (*JW* 3.35–39) (see Figure 5.1). By contrast, the gospel of John presents Jesus’ ministry as being conducted in Judaea and Jerusalem for the most part, with occasional journeys to Galilee at strategic moments in the narrative (John 4:1–3, 43). It also scores heavily in terms of its knowledge of the topography of Jerusalem, but gives very little insight into the social world of either region, whereas the Synoptics, both in their narratives and in the recorded sayings and parables of Jesus, give vivid if incomplete pictures of conditions in the northern region.

All four gospels fail to make any reference to either Sepphoris or Tiberias, the former refurbished under Herod Antipas to be ‘the ornament of all Galilee’, and the latter founded by him in 19 CE when Jesus was already an adult (Meyers 1986;

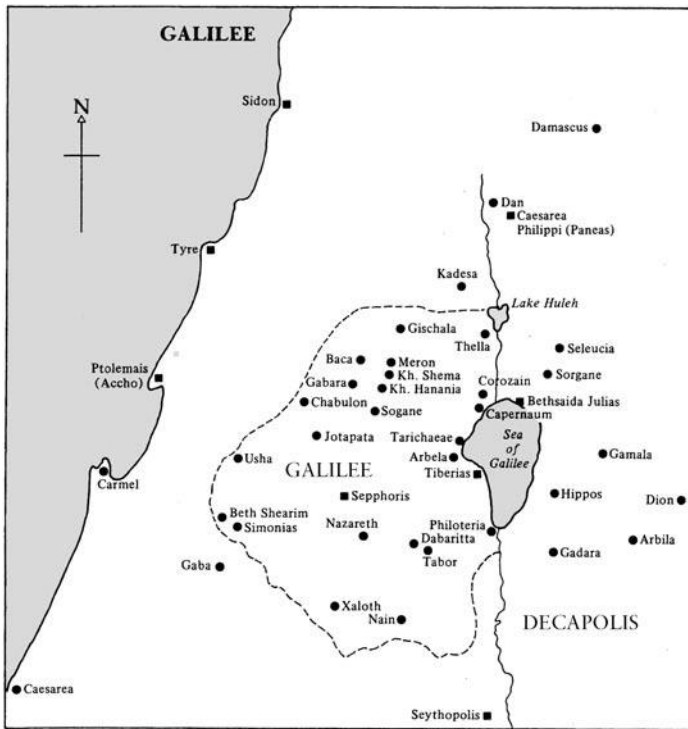


Figure 5.1 Map of Galilee in the first century CE, showing boundaries and settlements. From Freyne (1998), reprinted with the permission of the author and T&T Clark.

Meyers *et al.* 1992; Netzer and Weiss 1994; Meyers and Martin-Nagy 1997). The impression which these omissions give is that of a rural ministry to the villages of Galilee, but avoiding the chief urban centres, something that Mark underlines in another way with his references to journeys to ‘the territory of the Gerasenes’ (or Gadarenes, 5:1), ‘the borders of Tyre’ (7:24, 31), ‘the middle of the region of the Dekapolis’ (7:31) and ‘the villages of Caesarea Philippi’ (8:27), but with no mention of any visit to the cities themselves. Despite some recent suggestions to the contrary, therefore (Case 1926; Overman 1988; Edwards 1988, 1992; Batey 1991), Jesus’ ministry was a decidedly non-urban one, at least as far as the evangelists are concerned (Freyne 1995a). The fact that by the time of their writing, the Christ-following communities were almost totally urban-based, would strongly suggest that in presenting the original Jesus-movement in this way, the gospel writers were reflecting the actual rather than a projected situation.

We shall have to explore the implications of this insight more thoroughly later, but first its methodological implications need to be considered. Peasants and peasant conditions are largely ignored in our written sources from antiquity, other than the gospels themselves. Roman writers present a highly idealized picture of the countryside and its conditions, but cultural anthropologists can assist by drawing comparisons with traditional village life as it still exists in the Mediterranean world (Malina

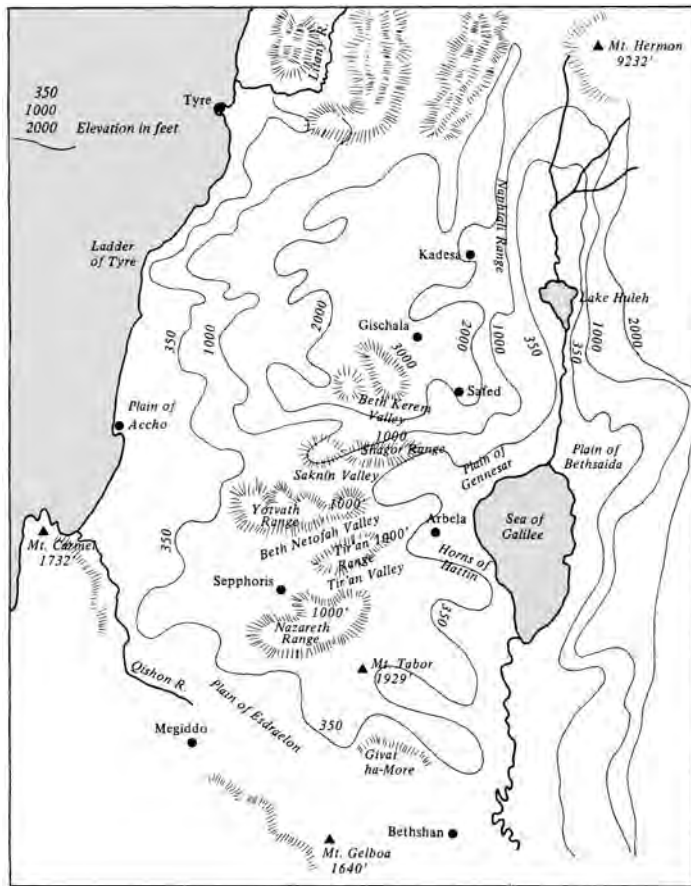


Figure 5.2 Galilee: the physical features. From Freyne (1998), reprinted with the permission of the author and T&T Clark.

and Rohrbaugh 1992). Archaeology is also useful, especially in its more recent developments of ethno- and socio-archaeology, which are concentrated on non-urban sites and attempt to interpret the data from both excavations and surveys within regional and ethnic boundaries (Meyers 1976, 1985; Meyers *et al.* 1978; Meyers and Meyers 1989; Overman 1993; Oakman 1994; Freyne 1995b; Horsley 1996). The study of pottery has also advanced beyond mere typological classifications such as ‘Galilean pottery’, based on shapes, handles and rim thickness. A more precise determination of the provenance and distribution of locally produced common, as distinct from imported, fine ware can be established through chemical and petrographical analysis of selected sherds from different sites. Thus trading and other networks can be traced with greater confidence and patterns of cultural affiliation deciphered with more precision (Adan-Bayewitz 1993). The remainder of this brief survey of Galilean society in the first century CE will attempt to sketch the resulting picture that emerges from the use of these different approaches,



Figure 5.3 A contemporary fisherman landing his catch at Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee.
Photo Philip F. Esler.

following in the directions in which our texts (mainly Josephus and the gospels) point us.

A PYRAMID OF POWER

The Lenski model of social stratification in advanced agrarian societies

Most recent social historians of Roman Palestine depend on Gerhard Lenski's sociological model for advanced agrarian societies, meaning those which practise agriculture using an iron-tipped plough and thus usually produce a surplus of produce (1966). This suggests a highly stratified model of society in which all power is concentrated with a ruling elite at the top of a broadly based pyramid, and who comprise only a tiny minority of the total population. A diagram of this model in relation to first-century CE Palestine appears in Richard Rohrbaugh's chapter in this volume (see Figure 8.2). At the bottom are to be found slaves, the landless poor and other marginalized groups, the destitute who have no voice. Above these are the small peasant landowners, either freeholders or leaseholders of family-sized plots, whose surplus is largely siphoned off in terms of tributes and/or taxes and rents, and whose way of life was one of mere subsistence. Artisans of various kinds come next and these too belong to the ruled rather than the ruling class, but whose skills make

them more mobile and less vulnerable to changes at the top of the power structure. Towards the top of the pyramid come the retainer classes – priests, scribes and other functionaries of the state – whose loyalty and services on behalf of the ruling class and the native aristocracy (not necessarily identical groups) are rewarded by the relative status within the tightly knit system of honour, which was the most prized possession in Mediterranean society (Hanson and Oakman 1998). Next comes the native aristocracy in whose interest it is to collaborate with the ruling elite, and who for the most part consist of wealthy, often absentee landlords dwelling close to the centres of power and influence. The ruling elite control and run the system in their own interest and are extremely sensitive to any shifts or movements that might threaten their position of dominance.

Refining the Lenski model for Galilee

Useful as such a generalized picture undoubtedly is in any attempt at constructing a picture of ancient societies, including Galilee, it should be recognized immediately that it is an ideal type, not an actual description of how things really were. It is open to revision in the light of historical or other special factors that can be shown to have been operative in any particular context. In fact both Galilean and Judean society would seem to require such a revision, because, as we shall see, of the special role that a shared religious affiliation played within the system, ultimately bringing about a serious clash between the native aristocracy and the ruling elite, which culminated in the first Jewish revolt of 66–70 CE.

But there were other complications also. Who, precisely, are we to nominate as the ruling elite in first century Galilee? Herod Antipas and his immediate family and court are the most likely contenders, but it must not be forgotten that Antipas' appointment as tetrarch of Galilee was very much at the behest of his Roman overlords, who refused his claims to succeed his father, Herod the Great, as king of the Jews. Indeed his removal and subsequent banishment in 37 CE in favour of his nephew Agrippa I, shows how precarious his position was. Should we then see Antipas and his court as the ruling elite, the semi-native aristocracy or merely retainers acting on behalf of the Roman imperial overlords? Lenski's model will not easily assist in sorting out the complex network of power comprising Antipas, the native Galilean aristocracy, styled *hoi protoi tês Galilaias* (Mark 6:21, and frequently in Josephus' *Life*), the Jerusalem priestly authorities, the procurator of Judaea and the Roman governor of Syria, who seems to have had a watching brief over client kings in the East during the pre-provincial period in Judaea and Arabia, at least after the death of Herod the Great.

Antipas' relative absence from the account of Jesus' public ministry in Galilee is noteworthy. The fact that Jesus' mentor, John the Baptist, was murdered by him because of the threat of social unrest, might have applied to Jesus also, one would have imagined. Yet, it is only Luke who suggests a direct threat from Antipas in Galilee (13:31), and he subsequently involves him, if only perfunctorily, in the trial in Jerusalem (23:6–12). Mark is aware of a threat from the Herodians (3:6, 12:13), but Herod is presented as inept, credulous and detached; his interest in Jesus is voyeurish rather than political (6:14–31). The Baptist had been operative in Perea

rather than in Galilee, the other district that was under Antipas' control (JA 18.119). His first marriage to a Nabataean princess had been political, and its dissolution had led to a conflict with her father, Aretas IV. He must therefore have been particularly sensitive about any disturbance in the region of Transjordan, since this would certainly not have helped his cause in Rome, particularly in view of the deposition of his brother Archelaus because of disturbances in Jerusalem. By contrast, Jesus seems to have had a freedom of movement in Galilee, unless one is to interpret his transfer from Nazareth to Capernaum as an evasive tactic from the immediate sphere of influence of Sepphoris and its demands.

Two other aspects of the proposed model call for comment. First, Lenski himself was conscious of the fact that within the Jewish tradition the priestly retainer class may not always have operated in favour of the ruling elite, because of the emphasis within that tradition on God's just care (*sedeqah*) for the *anawim* or the pious poor. It is not at all clear who might have exercised such a 'religious authority' in Galilee, or how in time they would have related to the Roman puppet administration there, however. There were no native Galilean priests, it would seem, but Josephus would have us believe that the peasants willingly brought their tithes to him and his two priestly colleagues on his appointment as governor of the region in 66 CE, 'because they were due to me as a priest' (Josephus, *Life* 81). A later Talmudic anecdote relates how an eminent Jerusalem scribe, Johanan ben Zakkai, spent a considerable time in Galilee, but without having much success with the population there, which, if true, may indicate no more than a lack of interest in the pharisaic halachic concerns. The gospels too refer to scribes and Pharisees coming from Jerusalem to Galilee to challenge Jesus' influence with the crowds (Mark 3:22, 7:1), and Josephus mentions the strong pharisaic composition in the delegation sent from Jerusalem to unseat him in 66 CE (*Life* 198). While this may suggest that Pharisees were popular in Galilee by that stage, it may merely be a reflection of the influence wielded in Jerusalem by the Pharisee, Simon, who was a friend of Josephus' implacable enemy in Galilee, John of Gischala. In short, we have no clear picture of who the native Galilean religious and scribal authorities were or how they related with the populace at large on an ongoing basis. If we could trust Josephus' account of his own popularity with the Galileans as a Jerusalemite priest, this would confirm Lenski's suspicion that the priestly class did not always function in favour of the ruling elite. Even if we are to dismiss the account of his popularity with the Galileans as part of his defence against the charges of Justus of Tiberias, it still remains true that, together with other members of the Jerusalem aristocracy, he did become embroiled in a rebellion against Rome, no matter how much he tried to cover his tracks subsequently. On the supposition that the bulk of the Galileans we encounter in both the gospels and Josephus were descended from those with Hasmonean rather than Herodian loyalties (Aviam 1993, 1995), as will be discussed later, we may assume that they would have been less than impressed with the Herodian celebration of Rome at their expense in the renaming of Sepphoris as *Autokratis* and the founding of Tiberias in order to honour Augustus and his successor.

The second relevant factor that needs to be taken into account in terms of the appropriateness of Lenski's model is the specific nature of Jewish relationship with the land, and the impact this was likely to have had on the continued existence of an

independent Jewish peasant class in the early first century. The issue is complicated due to our lack of detailed information on the specific Galilean setting. Yet from scattered pieces of evidence it is possible to infer that a combination of large estates and small, family-run farms co-existed, symbols of two different worlds and their impact on the changing face of Palestinian society (Fiensy 1991). The Zenon papyri from the third century BCE, as well as the parables of Jesus and the information from Josephus about Herodian possessions – both from the first century CE (Mark 12:1–12; Bernice, *Life* 119f.; Herodias, *JA* 18.252–5; Crispus, Agrippa II's prefect in Tiberias, *Life* 33ff.) – would seem to confirm the existence of estates in Galilee, even though no archaeological evidence has so far come to light for large villas similar to Ramath ha-Nadiv, north of Caesarea Maritima (Figure 5.4), a city rebuilt by Herod the Great and named in honour of his friend Augustus Caesar, or the field towers in Samaria (Hirschfeld and Birger-Calderone 1991; Dar 1986). The same sources indicate the continued presence of smaller holdings whose owners lived in nucleated villages throughout the Galilee, however.

Indeed, Herod the Great, both in his settlement of cavalry veterans at Gaba in the Carmel region on the borders of Galilee and Babylonian Jews in Batanea, continued this pattern of small family-run farms, whose inhabitants could be relied upon, when required to answer a call to arms (*JA* 15.294; *Life* 115–18 – Gaba; *JA* 17.25 – Batanea). In other words, strategically, it was not in his interest to disrupt entirely



Figure 5.4 Roman aqueduct at Caesarea Maritima. Photo by R. Barry Matlock

the patterns of land-ownership which had been established in Hasmonean times, inspired by the old Israelite ideals, even when royal lands inherited from previous rulers were retained for his and his family's benefit.

We shall later discuss the economic implications of such a conclusion, but here it is important to note that in so far as the pattern of small landowners was warranted by the biblical ideal, it ran counter to the trends of later Hellenistic and Roman imperial designs, and is another example of how a generalized model will have to yield to contrary evidence in order to avoid a distorted picture of the actual situation. Subsequent events in terms of the two revolts were to show how the Galilean peasants, together with those of other regions in Jewish Palestine, prized their freedom (Applebaum 1977). Hence a model such as Lenski's, which suggests that they were locked into a system over which they had no control, needs – like any model when faced with facts which do not readily correspond to it – to be qualified to accord with the situation both of the peasants and of those who were charged by Rome to control the region.

All that having been said, there are individuals within the Galilean social world who may be described as belonging to the retainer class. The best attested are those charged with the extraction of benefits from the natives (tax collectors) and the enforcement of sanctions through the administration of justice. The general impression is that these latter are to be avoided if possible, since the image of the harsh and uncaring judge crops up more than once in the sayings of Jesus (Matt. 5:25–6/Luke 12:58–9; Luke 18:1–8; Mark 13:9). We know from the Babatha documents, which were discovered in the Judaean desert, that going to court was a costly business, since Babatha from the village of Engeddi had to be present at the provincial capital, Petra, 'every hour of every day', until her case had been heard (Isaac 1992). Josephus, at least by implication, contrasts Antipas' style with that of his brother Philip in this regard. This latter conducted a circuit court to facilitate the peasants of his region in solving their disputes locally (JA 18.107). Jesus' message is to make peace with your adversary before going to court, since otherwise the last farthing (*kodranten/lepton*) will have to be paid.

The extent to which one can speak of a policing system is unclear outside the Herodian city environs, where presumably a prefect of police was in charge of law and order. The sayings of Jesus just cited mention the *hyperetes* or prison guard (Matthew), whereas Luke uses the more technical term *praktor* (meaning bailiff). The permanent army of the ruler would be responsible for maintaining order in the area generally, and presumably there were various garrisons throughout the region, especially at sensitive locations, or along the borders. Many of the Hasmonean foundations such as Sepphoris, Jotapata, Gischala and Gamla, were fortresses originally (M.Arakin 9.6), and retained something of that character subsequently, it would seem, on the basis of Josephus' descriptions when he took charge there in 66 CE. However, there is no evidence of a large military presence in Galilee. Indeed Sepphoris had to request a garrison from the Romans (*Life* 394). Antipas' regular army was of modest proportions, but we do hear of *chiliarchoi* present at his birthday celebrations (Mark 6:21), and a centurion approached Jesus at Capernaum (Matt. 8:5–13/Luke 7:1–10; cf. John 4:46–53). After the first revolt the Romans stationed a legion nearby, at Legio (Kefar Othnai) on the Great Plain, and not in Galilee itself.

The role of such a military presence was to ensure that the countryside remained loyal and that elites and trading caravans could travel freely and safely. In times of special crisis the peasantry would be expected/obliged to form a local militia, as Josephus was able to command in Galilee during his time there (*Life* 102, 386, 392). It is presumably to such as these that John the Baptist's admonition 'to be content with their pay' (Luke 3:14) was directed, since the opportunity for looting was all too real in the ancient world.

Tax-collectors are well represented in the gospel records as companions of Jesus, but their negative standing is underlined by their frequent association with sinners (Mark 2:16; Matt. 11:19, 21:31; Luke 7:34, 15:1, 18:13, 19:7); that is, other publicly discredited members of society such as prostitutes. The fact that Jesus openly consorted with these people was a source of scandal to more observant Jews, and raises the question of the religious and political implications of such behaviour (Herrenbrück 1981, 1987). Those sent to collect the tribute by Herod the Great did have a reputation for venality and lewdness (*JA* 17, 304–9), but that need not have been true of all engaged in such activity. At the lower end of their profession as toll collectors rather than the hated tax-farmers of earlier times, the *telonai* of the gospels were 'subject to authority', as the centurion also had declared, and this brought social rather than economic marginalization. That was sufficient to make them welcome members of the Jesus retinue, with his inclusive vision of the kingdom of God.

ECONOMIC SYSTEMS

Mention of tax-collectors inevitably raises the issue of economic realities in Galilee, a topic that looms large in the tradition of Jesus' deeds and words. His parables reveal an astute observer of the social realities of his world: absentee landlords, dishonest stewards, landowning peasants, day-labourers, housewives, fishermen, merchants, widows, judges, builders, masters and servants, are all represented in his stories. The wonders of nature and the fruitfulness of the earth are observed, the importance of seasonal rains and summer suns recognized. Jesus is no starry-eyed romantic, but someone who is alive to the variety of human life around him, and deeply aware of its beauty but also of its inequalities. Money is a fact of life, but thieves and brigands are a constant threat. Hoarding possessions was an occupational hazard, but equally debt was an ever-present reality. The poor inevitably loom large, but this may be due to the particular emphasis of Jesus, and his special concern for the marginalized (Oakman 1986), since the picture of Galilean society that one garners from Josephus' *Life*, 30 years later, is that of a self-sufficient peasantry, able to provision itself as a rural militia, supportive of Josephus, and bitterly opposed to the Herodian centres of Sepphoris and Tiberias (Freyne 1992).

Land was the primary resource, but in scarce supply, as the biblical ideal of each Israelite owning his own plot of ground within Eretz Israel came under renewed threat from the 'developments' of the market economy of Hellenistic and Roman times. Nehemia had instigated a reform in fifth-century Judah after the return from exile, because of the unequal distribution of land and the resulting debts incurred by

the returnees, unable to pay their taxes (Neh. 5:1–13). The Hasmoneans also supported the ideal (1 Macc. 14:12), in theory at least, if not always in practice.

The lake was also a natural resource unique to Galilee, giving rise to a thriving fish industry, as the remains of many harbours, breakwaters and fish ponds from Roman times indicate (Nun 1988). The industry was taxed and this could have made life difficult at times (Hanson and Oakman 1998). Nevertheless, as fishermen whose family-run business had hired servants, the very first followers of Jesus (in Mark 1:16–20) were not the impoverished peasants they are often portrayed to have been. For fishermen such as these (although parallel accounts in Matt. 4:18–22 and Luke 5:1–11 do not mention hired labour), following Jesus was probably a choice they made, rather than arising from necessity. Jesus is described as a *tekton*, that is an artisan – a stone-mason or carpenter probably – and he too would not have been an economically marginalized figure. Like his own followers later, he had chosen the desert in order to follow the Baptist's way. On returning to Galilee after John's death he identified with the social and economic injustices he saw his own people experiencing.

Galilee was certainly not a desert. The melting winter snows from Hermon and seasonal rains ensured good growth and the production of a variety of crops. Josephus waxes lyrical about the climatic conditions of the plain of Genessar in the region of Capernaum, with its luxuriant range of fruits (JW 3.506–21). But the valleys of lower Galilee also yielded a variety of grain crops as well as flax, according to both Josephus and the rabbinic sources (JW 3.42–3; Safrai 1994). The slopes of upper Galilee were suitable for the growth of the vine and olive, supporting the production of wine and oil, so graphically illustrated in the entrepreneurial activity of John of Gischala, as reported by Josephus (*Life* 74ff.; JW 2.259f.; cf. Frankel 1992). This in turn required storage jars, pitchers and other ceramic ware, which were produced at the villages of Kefar Hanania and Shikhin, the former located on the borders of upper and lower Galilee and the latter near to Sepphoris (Adan-Bayewitz and Perlman 1990; Strange *et al.* 1994, 1995). Ceramic ware was also required for the export of the fish brine which was transported as far as Rome, and no doubt there was need for boat-builders, net-makers and other skills to maintain that industry.

Taxation and its consequences

The pertinent question that most concerns students of the Galilean economy is the extent to which the benefits of these products accrued to the peasants themselves, or were creamed off by the elites in taxes and other exactions (Horsley 1995: 202–22). In terms of our earlier discussion, the question is whether the Galilean economy was a politically controlled one to the extent that the peasants were mere serfs. In a word, who owned the primary resource of the land and in whose interest was it utilized? The answer proposed earlier – namely, that the Galilean landownership situation was a combination of large estates and family-run holdings – based on the available evidence, does allow for some degree of independence for the Galilean peasants. Elsewhere, I have argued that the refurbishment of Sepphoris (Figure 5.5) and the building of Tiberias marked a turning point in terms of the Galilean economy, a



Figure 5.5 The theatre at Sepphoris. Photo Douglas Oakman.

watershed which coincided with Jesus' public ministry and provides the immediate backdrop to its particular emphasis on the blessedness of the destitute and the call for trust in God's provident care (Freyne 1994, 1995b). The new Herodian class had to be accommodated, and inevitably those peasants who could not meet the demands of the tribute of the soil (*tributum soli*) and the poll tax (*tributum capitis*), which were standing annual demands, in addition to the religious dues to the temple and priesthood enjoined by Pentateuchal law, were quickly reduced to penury. Debt was followed by appropriation of property, with the prospect of slavery or brigandage as the only alternative ways of life (Horsley and Hanson 1985; Freyne 1988b).

Yet this picture has to be balanced by the evidence from, admittedly, later sources which show that a Jewish peasant class did survive the crisis of the two revolts. We find the rabbinic sources replete with references to markets, village traders, laws to do with buying and selling and the like (Safrai 1994; Lapin 1995). This cannot be dismissed as mere idealization of later generations, but is rather a continuation of patterns we can already discern in such first-century sources as the gospels and Josephus' writings. One revealing piece of evidence is the threatened strike by the peasants – mainly Galilean, it would seem, since they had gathered at Tiberias – which occurred in the reign of the emperor Caligula (39 CE). In protest at the proposed erection of the emperor's statue in the Jerusalem temple, they decided not to till the land, and, significantly, some members of the Herodian family were dismayed, fearing that there would not be sufficient resources to pay the annual

tribute, thus leading to social anarchy (*JA* 18.273–4). The desecration of their temple was also a desecration of the land that was the guarantee of Yahweh's continued presence. His temple and its priesthood had first rights to the blessings of the land (*Life* 63, 80, 348), before the demands of the foreign overlord were met, something Julius Caesar had recognized by his restoration in 47 BCE of the rights of the Jews to support their temple and the reduction of the annual tribute due to Rome (*JA* 14.190–216; Freyne 1980: 189). Now, however, Antipas was annually entitled to 200 talents (the equivalent of 600,000 Tyrian silver shekels) from Galilee and Perea, as a personal income. This compares favourably with his brother, Philip, in the neighbouring territory who was allowed only 100 talents, but Archelaus, before his deposition in 6 CE, had been granted 600 talents from Judaea, Samaria and Idumaea, together with the coastal towns of Strato's Tower (Caesarea Maritima) and Joppa (*JA* 17.318–20). It was still a considerable demand on the Galilean populace, however, and a direct tribute to Rome was presumably still applicable, even though this is not mentioned explicitly (Hoehner 1972).

Coinage and trade

Josephus does mention that John of Gischala used Tyrian money in his transactions with his fellow Jews from Syria. This piece of information is in line with archaeological evidence from various sites, where Tyrian coinage seems to dominate the numismatic finds at locations not just in upper Galilee, such as Meiron, Gischala and Khirbet Shema, but even at Gamla and Jotapata as well, both lower Galilean strongholds of Jewish nationalism in the first revolt (Hanson 1980; Raynor and Meshorer 1988; Barag 1982/3; Syon 1992/ 3). In addition, Tyrian coins predominate in a number of hoards that have been discovered in the Galilean region, the explanation for which is usually attributed to the fact that according to rabbinic decree at least, the temple dues were to be paid in Tyrian coinage (Hamburger 1959; Meshorer 1976; Ben David 1969). This is certainly a surprising decision, given the fact that these coins bore the image of Melqart/Herakles, the Tyrian god, and pious Jews were so sensitive in other respects with regard to any desecration of their temple, as we have just seen. The usual reason given is that the Tyrian shekel had retained a constant value in terms of its silver content for over a century and a half (126 BCE–56 CE), whereas other currencies in the region had been debased (Ben-David 1969: 9–16). All that being said, the financial needs of the Jerusalem temple must surely have stimulated the demands for Tyrian money all over Palestine, as the discovery of a hoard of Tyrian coins at Qumran also confirms (Schürer 1973–84: II 62–6). In addition to these monetary considerations, it should also be remembered that the Tyrian mint was by far the most important one in the region and hence there were a lot more of its coins in circulation than those from such other places as Ptolemais or Sidon (Barag 1982/3). Furthermore, the Herodians were not allowed to produce silver coins, presumably because this would have given them too great a degree of independence. Thus, we cannot infer from the quantity of coins alone that Galilean commercial relations were concentrated on that one Phoenician city. Coins remained in circulation for a very long time after their date of issue in

antiquity, and they may have served transactions at several different locations, and not just the place of production and final deposition.

There are other reasons, however, for thinking that Galilean commercial activities had their most important outlet in Tyre. As is well known, this was a maritime city with several colonies in the western Mediterranean, including Carthage and Cadiz. Built on a narrow promontory with the mountains behind coming very close to the sea, it did not enjoy a natural hinterland such as Sidon to the north or Ptolemais to the south. It needed a constant supply of goods as well as a safe passage in the interior for those availing of its port. Ezechiel gives an impressive list of those requirements and Tyre's various relations, including those with Judah and the land of Israel – wheat, honey, oil and balm were exchanged for its wares, and, presumably, later for its money (Ezek. 27:12–25; Diakonoff 1992). As early as the reign of Solomon, the temptation was for Tyre to encroach on the interior by expanding its own frontiers, and this occurred also under Marion, a prince of Tyre, during the troubled period of the Roman civil wars. While Caesar restored the occupied territory to the ethnarchy of the Jews, as previously mentioned, Tyre must have continued to control some land in the interior, since at the outbreak of the first revolt, Qadesh, situated on the borders of Galilee, is said to be 'a strong inland village of the Tyrians, always at feud and strife with the Galileans', but which elsewhere is said to have 'once belonged to Galilee' (*JW* 4.105; *JA* 5.63). Obviously such encroachments created tensions, which must have erupted from time to time, especially when they meant the appropriation of lands or at moments of strong nationalist feelings. Yet inevitably relations are normalized when they are in the interests of both sides (Rappaport 1992). There were Jews living in Tyre at the time of the anti-Jewish outbursts in the Syrian cities in 66, and presumably it was to visit Jewish villages in the region that the charismatic healer/prophet Jesus entered the territory where he had an encounter with the woman interestingly described by Mark as 'Greek, but Syro-Phoenician by birth' (Mark 7:26; Theissen 1992; Schmeller 1994). Thus we can readily imagine movement in both directions. While the rabbis opposed Jews attending markets because of the danger of idolatry in a pagan city, they were not opposed to sale to a gentile elsewhere (McMullan 1970; Safrai 1994). Mark tells us of villages, markets and fields in the Galilean countryside where provisions could be bought and where crowds congregated (Mark 6:36, 56). It is at such places – rather than in the large cities – that, for the most part, exchange would take place for village people, either with travelling merchants or with native entrepreneurs, like John of Gischala, who would then sell on the goods at the main centres.

This account of the economic situation in Galilee is, as already emphasized, tentative in view of the nature of the evidence. Undoubtedly, on a macro level the economy was politically controlled and driven for the benefit of the wealthy elites, and this meant a tendency towards larger estates and the erosion of the values associated with the family-run holding. In purely commercial terms the family is not a very productive unit, since weaker and aged members are protected by the ancestral laws. Despite the pressures, that older system was, we have claimed, able to maintain itself within the Jewish sphere of life, thereby resisting being taken over completely by Roman policies. As mentioned, it was often in the interests of this system to maintain the older peasant order, since the alternative could be the

constant threat of brigandage as in the neighbouring lands of Batanea and Trachonitis. It was no accident that Herod the Great chose to pacify this region when it was given to him by Augustus in 23 CE by the planting of Babylonian Jewish peasants in the region, since rootedness to the soil and a stable kinship culture were deeply built into the Jewish ethos. Shared religious beliefs which received expression at the great festivals in Jerusalem helped to cloak the discrepancies between these peasants and the Jewish authorities. Yet venal Roman governors and an uncaring native aristocracy eventually tipped the scales to the point where the peasants were prepared to engage in a brief but bloody struggle to rid themselves of the Roman yoke, and at the same time take revenge on those of their own who were perceived as collaborating with the imperial power. This is the scenario that comes into full light of day in 66 CE with the first Jewish revolt, but there seems little doubt that the stirrings associated with this outburst go back to Antipas' reign, and the disruption that took place in his desire to win the favour of his Roman overlords. Of all the various movements of protest that can be documented from the first century – sign prophets, popular Messiahs and the like – the Jesus movement is the only one explicitly located in Galilee (Freyne 1988a; Horsley and Hanson 1985). Its particular emphasis on God's care for all, its proposal of a non-violent way to peace in contrast to the imposed *pax Romana* of Rome and its declaration of the blessedness of the poor, can all be understood against the immediate backdrop of the Galilean social world. The solutions that it offered to the problems of the peasants were perhaps too utopian in their radical expression of abandoning home, family and possessions, to have been adopted by the majority of Galileans, but they were rooted in the vision of the prophets that the God of Israel had a passion for justice that ultimately transcended the boundaries even of Israel itself.

CULTURAL AFFILIATIONS

The assumption of this chapter is that the Galilean world of Jesus was essentially Jewish in its inspiration. Not everybody today agrees with that assumption (Bauer 1967; Grundman 1941; Crossan 1991; cf. Betz 1994), and Galilean social and cultural life is often portrayed in varying shades of gentile colouring that seem hard to sustain in the light of both the literary and the archaeological evidence. This does not mean that there were no outside influences in the region. Indeed, the trading contacts with Tyre that we have suggested would preclude any such narrow horizons. However, the Jewishness or otherwise of Galilee is often posed in terms where Judaism and Hellenism are seen as opposing and mutually exclusive forces. Such a picture may well have suited certain stereotypes of ghettoized Jews of the nineteenth century, but it does not fit the reality of first-century Palestine and its social world of economic and cultural exchange in the wake of the Hellenization of the East, as this is understood today (Hengel 1973).

Several theories concerning the ethnic mix of Galilee have in fact been put forward. The designation of Isaiah (8:23), *galil baggoyim* ('Galilee of the gentiles'), repeated by the author of 1 Macc. (5:15), was assumed by many influential scholars to be an accurate description of both the ethnic mix and the cultural affiliation of

first-century Galilee. The sinister side of this view emerged with Grundman's 1941 book, claiming that since Galilee was pagan, Jesus was not a Jew. Alternatively, the fact that a semi-nomadic Arabic people, the Itureans, had infiltrated upper Galilee during the period of the break-up of the Seleucid empire, only to be given the option (by the Hasmonean, Aristobulus I in 104 BCE) of leaving or being circumcised (JA 13.318–19), suggests to others that the Galileans were in fact forcibly judaized Arabs, and hence had dubious loyalty to Jerusalem and its cult centre. Still another view, first developed by Albrecht Alt (1953–64), sees the Galileans as descendants of the old Israelite population of the northern kingdom. These had been largely undisturbed when the Assyrians made their first onslaught on Israel in 732 BCE; it was only after the capital Samaria fell in 721 that wholesale deportations took place and people of non-Israelite stock were planted in their place. According to Alt, these descendants of northern Israelites entered the *ethnos tôn Ioudaion* freely when the opportunity arose for them to join the Jerusalem cultic community during the Hasmonean conquests in the second century BCE. Richard Horsley (1995) also supports the idea of the Galileans as Israelites, but views their inclusion into the Jewish community quite differently from Alt. According to him, they should not be identified with the Judeans, since these latter imposed their laws and customs on unwilling northerners who struggled to maintain their separate identity, thus setting up a situation of tension, if not outright conflict that continued down to later centuries. For Horsley, religious affiliations are secondary to social, political and economic factors, and from this perspective the Judeans' expansion to Galilee is interpreted by him as an aggressive imposition by the temple state and its officials, prepared to collaborate with the Roman imperial power for their own benefit.

It is not possible to discuss these various opinions in detail here. Suffice to say that while there may indeed have been *some* gentiles and Itureans living in Galilee, they do not appear within the borders of the territory which Pompey assigned as Jewish, when he intervened in the civil war that had broken out between the Hasmonean brothers in 67 BCE. The Iturean territory was more to the north and west of the political Galilee of the first century, with its centre at Chalcis in the Lebanon (Schottroff 1982). Few traces of the distinctive Iturean pottery and building style have been found in Galilee proper. It should be remembered that the Hasmoneans had inherited the idea of a 'greater Israel' that extended well to the north of Damascus (Ezek. 47:15–17), and it was presumably in this more northerly region around Hermon and beyond that they encountered the Iturean presence (Dar 1993). Nor does the Alt/Horsley hypothesis convince either, again in the light of the archaeological evidence which suggests that Galilee was sparsely populated until the second century BCE (Gal 1992), when many settlements that were Hasmonean foundations began to appear (Aviam 1993, 1995). Thus, in all probability, by the first century BCE the inhabitants of Galilee were indeed of Judean extraction, but all the evidence from sites such as Jotapata, Sepphoris and Gamla suggests that they had inculturated in the north, while maintaining their religious ties with Jerusalem and the south in terms of concerns for purity and the distinctively Jewish way of life (Adan-Bayewitz and Aviam 1997; Meyers 1992). Thus the Galileans of the later sources should be seen, not as disaffected Israelites (for whom Samaria would have been their natural cultic home), but as Jews/*Ioudaioi* in the sense of adherents of the

way of life associated with the Jerusalem temple and its cult, irrespective of their place of origin or residence (Ashton 1985; Freyne 1987). This sense of cultural and religious affiliation, rather than politico-geographical expansionism that the term *Jew/Ioudaios* had come to denote by the first century CE in both literary and inscrip-tional sources (Kraemer 1989; Freyne 1999), should be regarded as dominant. It is just one other example of how the evidence to hand rather than general sociological theory must determine any reconstruction of the past.

JESUS IN HIS GALILEAN WORLD

At the outset of this survey mention was made of the ways in which historical Jesus research and Galilean studies have mutually influenced each other over the past two centuries, to the point at which the one was in danger of being collapsed into the other. Interest in the social and cultural life of Galilee has far outweighed that of other regions (for example, Samaria, Judaea or Idumea) because, following the Syn-optic outline, Jesus' ministry has been perceived as Galilean for the most part. At various points in the foregoing account certain details of that ministry were alluded to in passing, but it now seems incumbent to outline the implications of the social and cultural milieu just described for Jesus' whole career. This is not to adopt a deterministic view of history, as though individual creativity has no part to play in shaping one's contribution in the public sphere. Some accommodation and adapta-tion to the context is, however, essential for any reformer to make an impact, no matter how charismatic one may be.

The different accounts of Jesus' ministry in Galilee in recent discussions can be reduced to four main types: (a) Jesus the leader of a zealot revolutionary group (Brandon 1967); (b) Jesus the Cynic counter-culturalist (Crossan 1991); (c) Jesus the radical social reformer (Horsley 1987); (d) Jesus the Jewish prophetic Messiah (Meyer 1979). Each of these portraits is based both on certain judgements about the historical reliability of the canonical and non-canonical gospels and on varying accounts of the Galilean social and religious ethos. On the basis of the account presented here (a) and (b) can be ruled out as not providing the overall setting within which such portrayals appear likely or plausible. In the first century CE Galilee was neither a hot-bed of violent revolutionaries bent on the overthrow of Rome, nor a region dominated by pagan influences emanating from the Greek cities. On the other hand (c) and (d) are not mutually exclusive in that Jewish Messianic hopes have typically a strong concern for justice, peace and renewal of Israel. The issue then becomes one of the extent to which Jesus' vision was fired by Jewish religious hopes in the same way that these found expression at the levels of both popular Messianisms and in dissident groups which were unhappy with the prevail-ing ruling elites, Jewish and Roman alike (Horsley and Hanson 1985; Collins 1995; Oegma 1998). In this regard the relationship between Galilee and Jerusalem appears to be of crucial importance since it determines whether Jesus' critique of the temple and its institution was a principled one based on long-established regional opposi-tions, or was, rather, the result of deep dissatisfaction with the existing ruling priestly elite.

It has been argued that the Galilean ethos of the first century was Jewish in that the dominant strand in the population originated in the Hasmonean period in Judea and that they continued to see themselves attached to the cultic centre of Jerusalem and its temple. That attachment was expressed concretely through pilgrimage, offerings and the observance of purity, emanating from the temple and the priestly views of holiness. The Hasmonean expansion was at least partly grounded in the notion of an ideal holy land as described in Ezekiel's prophecy of restoration, comprising also the return to their traditional territories of the twelve tribes (Ezek. 47:13–48:39). Galilee was part of that restoration, and any reformer who based his vision on the notion of the return of the tribes, as Jesus did in the constitution of his permanent retinue as the Twelve (Mark 3:13–19; Matt. 19:28), while at the same time asserting the centrality and holiness of Jerusalem within the restored Israel, might expect a ready and enthusiastic reception among Galilean Jews (Sanders 1985).

The Hasmonean ruling elite had been replaced in the first century by the Herodians, but only after Herod the Great had overcome their stout resistance. Herod the Great went on to pursue an ambitious building policy, which included the erection of a huge new platform in Jerusalem to serve as the base for a rebuilt Temple (see Figure 5.6) and smaller, but still impressive structures, such as his hanging palace at Masada (see Figure 5.7). Antipas, Herod's son, sought to follow the policy of his father by honouring the Romans through the dedication of his newly built cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias to his imperial patrons. Thus, a new element was introduced into the social world of Galilee, so that traditional kinship values were in danger of being eroded and economic hardship greatly increased. This situation of rapid change, it was suggested, provided the immediate context for Jesus' ministry, and may even have prompted a different awareness of and strategy for his own mission from that in which, as a disciple of John the Baptist, he had been previously engaged. Faced with the increasing marginalization of Galilean village communities, Jesus proposed a radical alternative that might be described as purely utopian, were it not for the fact that he and his immediate followers embarked on a lifestyle that embodied the values he was now espousing; namely, homelessness, rejection of property and family, based on a total dependence on God's care for all. Following him constituted a new form of kinship arising from shared ideals rather than blood ties or traditional ownership of property, ideals that were grounded in the prophetic vision for a renewed Israel in which all might share equally in the resources that Yahweh had provided.

Jesus and his followers may indeed have appeared to some contemporaries as counter-cultural extremists of the Cynic variety, yet the theological grounding of his 'values revolution' in an unconditional trust in the God of Israel must be attributed rather to the notion of the Jubilee (Lev. 25:8–17), especially as this found expression in such prophets of restoration as Trito-Isaiah (Isa. 58:6; 61:1–6). The levitical legislation for the Jubilee was grounded in the idea of the land of Israel being Yahweh's land, so that the Israelites were merely sojourners there (Sloan 1977). Every fiftieth year all Israel was to be reminded of this reality of its existence, of which the tribe of Levi, to whom no allotment was apportioned, was a permanent sign. Thus the Jubilee was a temple-based institution; honoured more in the ideal



Figure 5.6 The east wall of the Herodian Temple platform in Jerusalem. Photo J. C. N. Coulston.

than the real, it would appear in the period of the Second Temple – when social and economic factors proved too influential to allow for its implementation. However, in the hands of the later prophets it entered the repertoire of hopes for an ideal Israel in which the emphasis was placed on the ethical rather than the cultic dimension of her life, and it is no surprise to find that in the first century it also found a lively expression among the temple dissident Essenes, associated with the priesthood of Melchizedek, not the ruling one which claimed ancestry from Aaron (11Q Melch.)

Viewed in this light it is possible to construe a highly plausible picture of the Galilean ministry of Jesus which sees the particular shape of his message *and* ministry within the parameters of these two powerful institutions of Jewish political life – namely, temple religion and Roman power mediated by the Herodians. His religious concerns eventually brought him to Jerusalem, like every other Jewish country prophet, including Jesus, son of Ananias, his near contemporary and look-a-like – at least in Josephus' portrayal (*JW* 6.301–9). It was there that real opposition to him was mounted by the agents of both institutions, prepared to form a coalition when faced with a common threat of a possible revolt in the countryside. Even though the temple priestly aristocracy, the Herodians and the Roman provincial administration represented competing, even rival constituencies and vied with each other for control of the complex social network that was Roman Palestine of the first century, they were, like all elites, prepared to collaborate when faced with a



Figure 5.7 The hanging palace of Herod the Great at Masada. Photo J. C. N. Coulston.

challenge to their positions of status. Jesus and his movement represented such a threat, not because he was proposing a violent revolution such as the Zealots were to do thirty years later, nor because he was espousing a counter-cultural detachment so beloved of the Cynics, but rather because his movement represented a serious attack on the value system on which their status was based. It is an ironic fact of history that this movement which emerged within a thoroughly Jewish matrix and which was inspired by the Jewish prophetic ideal was to achieve its aims not within Palestine, but rather in the cities of the Mediterranean world, something that Luke, perceptive historian and shrewd apologist that he was, has so subtly documented in his two-volume work. Two centuries later, another Christian historian/apologist, Eusebius, saw the relationship between church and empire rather differently. But that is another story!

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EARLY JEWISH CHRISTIANITY



David G. Horrell

INTRODUCTION

At the time of its origins, all of what we now call Christianity was Jewish Christianity. Jesus was a Jewish prophetic figure who looked for the restoration of Israel under the rule of God.¹ All of his followers were Jews, and all of those who first proclaimed his resurrection and vindication as God's Messiah were Jews. Their belief that Jesus, crucified and risen, was God's promised Messiah distinguished them from their fellow Jews, but in all other respects they remained loyal Jews, worshipping at the temple according to the established Jewish pattern (Acts 3:1; see Falk 1995) and apparently faithful in their adherence to Torah (the Jewish Law). However, within a relatively short time, the message about Jesus the Messiah had begun to be shared with non-Jews, and there was diversity and disagreement about the extent to which Gentile (and Jewish [cf. Gal. 2:14]) believers in Christ should adhere to the Jewish way of life, with all that that entailed (see Acts 15). Paul, of course, looms large in such early and crucial debates (see e.g. Gal. 2:11–21). The key question for this chapter is: What became of this essentially Jewish Christianity which characterized the whole Christian movement at its point of origin?²

The terms 'Jewish Christianity', and 'Jewish Christian', not terms which ancient writers use,³ owe their prominence in contemporary discussion particularly to Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860), the famous Tübingen scholar who argued that the development of early Christianity was to be understood fundamentally in terms of a conflict between Petrine Jewish Christianity and Pauline Gentile Christianity, two opposing wings which came together in the 'synthesis' of orthodox Roman Christianity.⁴ On this view, Jewish Christianity is that form of Christianity associated especially with Peter, James, and other Jerusalem Christians, and often labelled, indeed denigrated, as 'conservative', 'legalistic', 'exclusive', etc. (see further Hill 1992). However, the question of how to define 'Jewish Christianity', and indeed whether it is a distinguishable phenomenon within early Christianity, remains a subject of ongoing debate.

Defining Jewish Christianity: the scope of this chapter

Even the terms 'Jew/Jewish' and 'Christian/Christianity' are not unproblematic. Before proceeding to discuss this phenomenon methodological caution suggests we examine these terms. Some scholars today (including contributors to this volume, Richard Rohrbaugh in Chapter 8 and Bruce Malina in Chapter 15) have abandoned use of the words 'Jew' or 'Jewish' as translations of the people known as *Ioudaioi* in the first century CE. They argue that *Ioudaioi* then signified – to Israelite and non-Israelite alike – persons who lived in or (although residing in the Diaspora) were oriented to *Ioudaia* (Judaea) and its holy city, Jerusalem, and the temple within it, so that the translation 'Jew' (or 'Jewish') fails to convey the core meaning of the word. They prefer 'Judaean'. Second, they suggest that 'Jew' is now so replete with reference to the subsequent history of this people that it is hard to avoid anachronism in employing it in relation to the first century CE. Although I do not consider that these arguments do necessitate dropping the words 'Jew' and 'Jewish', they do remind us of some of the implications involved in retaining their use. Similarly, although the word 'Christian' is most uncommon in the New Testament period (*Christianos* appearing only at Acts 11:26, 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16) and was probably not widely used as a self-designation until after the first century, I will continue to employ it as a term of convenience, rather than resorting to expressions such as 'Christ-followers' which are substituted for it in some quarters (as in Esler 1998).

Defining 'Jewish Christianity' itself is also a complex and debatable matter. Three main definitions of Jewish Christianity have been proposed. One is an ethnic definition; that Jewish Christians are those Christians who are ethnically Jews, Jews who became Christians. However, such a broad definition does not 'define' anything meaningful at all, not least because of the great diversity of belief and practice among such 'Jewish' Christians (e.g. Peter, James and Paul!; cf. Taylor 1993: 20–1; Carleton Paget 1999: 734). A second definition focuses on theological characteristics. Such a definition undergirds, for example, the massive study by Jean Daniélou (1964), who regarded Jewish Christianity as a type of Christian thought which characterized the church before what Daniélou called the 'Hellenistic' phase of the Church Fathers. In this way, in distinction to Hans-Joachim Schoeps (1964), who saw the ('heterodox') Ebionites (see pp. 154–5) as the classic expression of Jewish-Christian theology, Daniélou sought to show how a 'Jewish' form of theology undergirded the 'Great Church' – the 'orthodox' tradition – from the beginning. Of the many criticisms that may be brought against this approach perhaps the most telling is that, as with an ethnic definition, Daniélou's 'theological' definition is too broad to be useful. If 'Jewish Christianity' is defined as that form of Christianity which reflects the thought-patterns and literary forms of Judaism then virtually all of early Christianity is surely included.⁵

For these and other reasons, most scholars now seem to prefer a broadly 'praxis'-based definition of Jewish Christianity.⁶ In other words, 'early Jewish Christianity' designates Jews who recognized Jesus as Messiah (and may or may not have acknowledged his pre-existence or divinity)⁷ but who continued to observe the Jewish Law (Mimouni 1992: 184). This definition itself is by no means clear or watertight, for there remains, for example, the issue as to the extent of Jewish practice necessary for

someone to 'count' as a Jewish Christian (cf. Wilson 1995: 143; Carleton Paget 1999: 735). Nevertheless, it seems to offer the most meaningful and valuable definition of Jewish Christianity.

In this chapter, however, due to the scope assigned to it within this book, a somewhat wider view will be adopted which will enable us to track the diverse developments of the Jewish Christianity of the early Jerusalem community⁸ into the second century and beyond. There is certainly evidence, both within and outside the New Testament, of Jewish-Christian groups which did continue to follow a Jewish way of life while holding a Christian belief in Jesus as Messiah, though this evidence is sparse and often subject to considerable debate. Yet also important are the texts which reveal how essentially Jewish-Christian traditions came to be incorporated into the 'mainstream' of developing Christian orthodoxy, maintaining the 'symbolic world' of Jewish thought (and specifically of the Jewish scriptures) but abandoning Jewish praxis and even adopting an anti-Jewish posture. It is significant that the former of these routes – the genuinely Jewish-Christian tradition, according to a praxis-based definition – is one which, for reasons we shall explore and seek to explain below, was sidelined and eventually extinguished in the post-70 CE developments in Christianity and Judaism. Much of the important evidence for such Jewish-Christian groups derives from the writings of various anti-heretical writers of the second to fourth centuries, who record important information about the beliefs and practices of the members of these groups, and preserve extracts from their gospels (i.e. the so-called gospels of the Ebionites, of the Nazarenes, and according to the Hebrews).⁹ The latter route – the symbolic but non-praxis route – is evidenced in New Testament texts such as 1 and 2 Peter and Hebrews, and in non-canonical writings such as the *Didache* and the letter of *Barnabas*.¹⁰

FROM THE FIRST EASTER TO THE FALL OF JERUSALEM (70 CE)

Our main source concerning the life of the very earliest church is Acts, written probably some fifty years or so after the events it describes in its opening chapters. Because of this time gap, and the apparent tendencies and interests of the writer (known as Luke, also the author of the gospel by that name), its evidence must be used with some circumspection; indeed its portrait of the earliest community in Jerusalem and its success is undoubtedly somewhat idealized. Nevertheless, the picture of a group of Jews, led by a circle known as apostles, continuing to live and worship as Jews while proclaiming their faith in the risen Messiah Jesus, seems essentially accurate (see Acts 2:42–3:1).¹¹ The apparent unanimity of the community, however, evidently came under some threat due to the tensions between those Luke calls the 'Hebrews' and the 'Hellenists' – most likely Aramaic-speaking Jews from Palestine and Greek-speaking Jews from the Diaspora respectively (Acts 6:1–6; see Hengel 1983: 4–11; Hill 1992: 22–4). It is also clear that after this tension had emerged, and after persecution had driven some of the believers from Jerusalem, the message about Jesus began to be shared with non-Jews, notably in Antioch (Acts 11:20). The dominant view in current scholarship is that the tension

between the Hebrews and the Hellenists was theologically significant; that Stephen and the others mentioned in Acts 6:5 were leaders of the Hellenist group, in which there developed a theology more critical of law and temple than that held by the Hebrews; that it was the Hellenists particularly who were persecuted and driven from Jerusalem; and that it was the Hellenists who were primarily responsible for taking the gospel to non-Jews, and not requiring from gentile converts full adherence to Jewish law (see Hengel 1983: 1–29, 53–8; Wedderburn 1989). On this view, the basic division between Petrine Jewish Christianity and Pauline Gentile Christianity is already present *in nuce* in the earliest divisions within the Jerusalem community. However, Craig Hill (1992, 1996) has argued that the evidence cannot sustain such a neat ideological compartmentalization of the two major wings of the earliest church. Instead he sees considerable diversity and plurality among both Hebrews and Hellenists in the Jerusalem church, although perhaps without giving sufficient weight to the conflict apparent in Acts 6:1 (Esler 1995).

While there then may be more significance in the division between Hebrews and Hellenists than Hill allows, his warnings against the often pejorative labelling of the 'Hebrew' grouping as representing *en bloc* a 'conservative', 'legalistic' Jewish Christianity based in Jerusalem are important. There was indeed considerable diversity among the earliest Jewish Christians, not least in regard to the questions concerning the relationship between Jewish and gentile Christians, and the behaviour required of the latter.

Disagreement over this issue, and specifically over the question as to whether gentile converts should be circumcised, led to a 'conference' in Jerusalem, known as the 'Apostolic Council' (Acts 15:1–29; Gal. 2:1–10),¹² held sometime probably between 47 and 51 CE. Specifically, according to Luke, some of the Jewish Christians from Judaea had arrived in Antioch propagating the view that gentile converts must be circumcised, in opposition to the policy established there that gentiles need not become Jews (Acts 15:1; cf. Gal. 2:3–4). The meeting in Jerusalem was arranged in order to try and resolve the resulting dissension and disagreement. Paul and Barnabas were the most prominent representatives of the Antioch church at this conference, spokespersons for the view that gentile converts must not be compelled to 'Judaize' (cf. Gal. 2:14). Peter (see Figure 6.1) and James, named by Paul along with John as the 'pillars' of the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:9), were also prominent voices in the debate (James, the brother of Jesus, had by now become probably the dominant leader of the Jerusalem church; see Bauckham 1995: 427–50).

James in particular, according to Acts, was prominent in proposing a settlement that did not require full conversion to Judaism from gentile believers (and did not require their circumcision), but which laid down certain legal prescriptions for them (the so-called 'Apostolic Decree'): abstention from food offered to idols, from sexual immorality, from what has been strangled and from blood (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25). Richard Bauckham argues that these regulations are based on those set down for 'aliens' living among the Jews in Leviticus 17–18 (Bauckham 1995: 452–62).¹³ Paul's own account of the conference in Gal. 2:1–10 also records that circumcision was not imposed as a requirement, and that Paul's mission to the gentiles was apparently recognized as valid. However, Paul makes no mention of the Apostolic

Decree as such, and considerable doubt has been raised as to whether or not Paul would have accepted it, had it been proposed at the meeting.¹⁴

Whatever was or was not agreed in Jerusalem, it does not seem to have succeeded in ending the disagreement and conflict. The so-called ‘incident at Antioch’, reported by Paul (Gal. 2:11–21),¹⁵ was particularly significant. The church at Antioch had clearly established the practice whereby both Jews and gentiles ate together in the fellowship meals of the community, without the gentile believers having become Jews or following Jewish food laws.¹⁶ Peter, Paul and Barnabas all participated in this ‘mixed’ fellowship, until ‘certain people from James’ arrived, whereafter Peter, the other Jews, and even Barnabas (Paul’s missionary companion) withdrew (Gal. 2:12–13). While there remains much discussion as to precisely what the criticism of the people from James was,¹⁷ it seems clear that table-fellowship of Jews and gentiles was regarded by them as unacceptable, unless the gentiles adopted certain Jewish customs (no doubt regarding food; Gal. 2:12, 14). Esler goes further than this to argue that Peter (and James behind him) wanted the gentiles to become circumcised in breach of the agreement previously made in Jerusalem (1998: 117–40).

Diversity among those regarded as representatives of earliest Jewish Christianity, then, is apparent. Peter, it seems, while remaining a Jew with a mission to the Jews



Figure 6.1 Painting of Peter, late fourth or early fifth century CE, from the Catacomb of Marcellinus and Peter. From Wilpert (1903: plate 254).

(Gal. 2:7), was prepared to join in fellowship with gentiles who did not follow Jewish food-laws nor convert to Judaism, though he wavered in this view under pressure.¹⁸ James was more insistent on the need for gentiles to adopt certain requirements regarding food – probably those set down in Jewish law for non-Jewish resident aliens (cf. Lev. 17–18; note 13 above). However, it is not evident that he urged circumcision on the gentiles; indeed the evidence of Acts and Galatians suggests that he did not (cf. Bauckham 1995: 450–80).¹⁹ Some Jewish Christians at the time, however, did insist that circumcision was necessary for all who would be members of God's people. Not only do both Luke's and Paul's accounts of the Apostolic Conference make this clear (Acts 15:1; Gal. 2:3), but the conflict in Galatia which brings forth such heated polemic from Paul (e.g. Gal. 1:7–9; 3:1–5; 5:12) is evidently focused on that particular issue (Gal. 5:2–12; 6:12–15). Paul labels the proponents of such a view *pseudadelphoi*, 'false believers' (NRSV; Gal. 2:4), and finds himself opposing their Judaizing message elsewhere too (2 Cor. 11:13, 22; Phil. 3:2–7).²⁰ Among the early Jewish Christians, then (that is, among those Jews who believed in Jesus as Messiah but continued to practise a Jewish way of life in obedience to the law), there was diversity concerning what was required of gentile converts. The Decree which James seems to have promoted represents something of a middle way between those who saw no need for gentiles to adopt any of the marks of Jewish identity (Paul, and perhaps Peter – hesitantly), and those who argued for their full conversion to Judaism, with the attendant markers of circumcision, sabbath observance and food regulations (cf. Dunn 1990: 191–5).

The death of James and the flight to Pella

In 62 CE, Josephus records, James, the brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church, was executed (*Jewish Antiquities* 20.200). Peter and Paul each met a similar fate, not many years later (between 64 and 67 CE). As we shall see below, James' considerable and continuing influence may be seen in the literature associated with his name, and the reverence with which he was regarded, especially, though by no means exclusively, in Jewish-Christian circles (see also Martin 1988: xli–lxi; Laws 1980: 41–2).

An important, if scarcely documented, moment in the history of early Jewish Christianity probably followed shortly after the death of James. According to Eusebius (*HE* 3.5.3), just before the beginning of the Jewish revolt against Rome in 66 CE, Christians in Jerusalem were warned in an oracle to leave Jerusalem and go to Pella in the Decapolis (see Figure 6.2). While some scholars have disputed the historicity of this tradition (e.g. Lüdemann 1989: 200–13), on balance it seems that it should be cautiously accepted (see Pritz 1988: 122–7; Wilson 1995: 145–8; Carleton Paget 1999: 746–7). If this right, then this geographical 'flight' would likely provide the point of continuity between the earliest Jewish Christianity, based in Jerusalem, and the later Jewish-Christian sects, a number of which are located in Transjordan and Syria by the anti-heretical writers who discuss them (cf. Pritz 1988: 108, 120–1; Carleton Paget 1999: 748).

However, in spite of the Jewish War of 66–74 CE, a Jewish-Christian presence in Palestine seems also to have continued, or perhaps to have recommenced due to

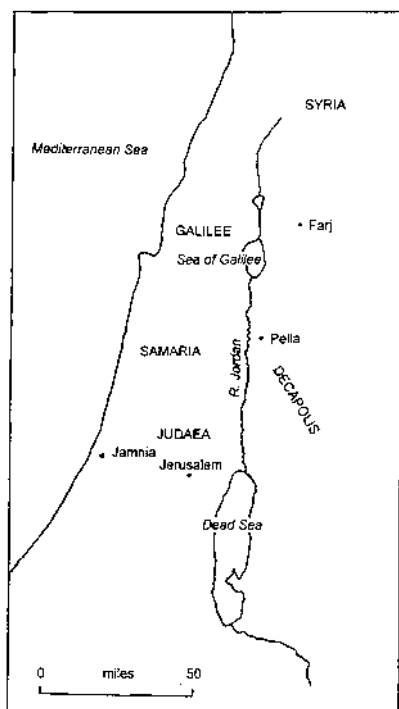


Figure 6.2 Map of Palestine in Roman times showing places mentioned in the text.

return to the region after the war. Eusebius recounts the appointment of James's successor as 'bishop' (*HE* 3.11, 4.22.4) and lists the 'bishops' of Jerusalem after James until the Bar Kochba Revolt (*HE* 4.5.1–5; see Bauckham 1990: 70–9). He also refers to Africanus' account of Christian missionary activity in Galilee carried out by relatives of Jesus (*HE* 1.7.14; Bauckham 1990: 60–70).

FROM THE FALL OF JERUSALEM TO THE BAR KOCHBA REVOLT (132–5 CE)

The Jewish War of 66–74 CE was of considerable significance for the development of both Judaism and Christianity (cf. Figure 6.3). Before 70 CE Judaism was characterized by diverse groups with varied beliefs and practices, and what we now call Christianity was essentially a Messianic sect within that plural matrix (see e.g. Rowland 1985: 65–80; Neusner 1984a). Even though Paul had played a large part, theologically speaking, in creating a notion of Christian identity which would eventually undergird Christianity's existence as a separate religion, before 70 this separation had hardly begun to take place, at least in Jewish-Christian circles (even Paul, after all, though regarded as a dangerous apostate by his fellow Jews, remained under the auspices of the synagogue and endured its discipline on a number of occasions; 2 Cor. 11:24).²¹ After 70 CE, however, tensions between Christians and



Figure 6.3 A sestertius minted in Rome in 72 CE in the Judaea Capta series commemorating victory over Judaea and the capture of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Copyright the University of St Andrews.

Jews increased, polemical exchanges became increasingly evident, and, from the late first century onwards, both 'religions' began, slowly, to develop a coherent 'orthodox' power-base, from which 'deviant' groups were expelled and excluded.²²

It is from this period of history that a number of texts important for the study of Jewish Christianity come, though there is debate about the dating of many of them, as we shall see.

Jewish-Christian texts of the late first century

As the discussions of definition and scope above will have revealed, ascertaining which texts should 'count' as Jewish-Christian is not entirely straightforward. Nevertheless, on the basis of the definition that Jewish Christians are Jews who believe in Jesus as Messiah but continue to live as Jews, upholding the Jewish law, there are certain New Testament texts which seem to bear witness to this form of early Christianity. Brief comments will also be made concerning the non-canonical text known as the *Didache*.

The letter of James

Since most scholars agree that the James who is named as the author of the letter of James (Jas. 1:1) is James the brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church, this letter is an obvious place to turn for an example of early Jewish-Christian teaching.²³ The majority of scholars do not think that James himself wrote the letter, at least not in its final form, and date it somewhat later than the lifetime of James (c. 75–100 CE). Nevertheless, its characteristics and teaching indicate a Jewish-Christian

tradition which may well be connected with James. While the letter is clearly a Christian writing (1:1; 2:1), and exhibits many parallels with gospel traditions in Q and Matthew (see Hartin 1991; Martin 1988: lxxv–lxxvi), it is addressed in a thoroughly Jewish way to ‘the twelve tribes of the Diaspora’ (1:1) and has very little explicitly or exclusively Christian theology. More prominent, along with its evident concern for the poor and criticism of the rich (1:9–11, 2:1–7; 5:1–6), is its concern for ‘wisdom’ (1:5; 3:13–17) – a strongly Jewish tradition – and its high regard for the law and its fulfilment, especially in opposition to any view which suggests that faith does away with the need for works (1:25; 2:8–26; 4:11–12). The law is described as ‘the royal law’ (2:8), ‘the law of liberty’ (1:25; 2:12). The heart of the law is located in Lev. 19:18: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself, yet the whole law is to be fulfilled (2:8–11; cf. Gal. 3:10); there is no hint that its ‘ritual’ or ‘ceremonial’ demands, including circumcision etc., are no longer in force. Indeed the structure and content of the argument in Jas. 2:14–26, compared with Rom. 3:27–4:22 (see Dunn 1988: I, 197), suggest that this teaching is directed against Paul, or, rather, against a developed or distorted version of Paul’s teaching (cf. Chester 1994: 46–53; Wilson 1995: 154). While Paul always insisted that his gospel was not a licence to sin (Rom. 3:8; 6:1ff.; Gal. 5:13f.), his emphasis on freedom, on no longer being ‘under the law’ (Rom. 6:14–15; 1 Cor. 9:20; Gal. 5:18), and on justification coming by faith and not through the ‘works of the law’ (Rom. 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16, etc.) could and did lead to the accusation that Paul abandoned the law and its demands, and taught others to do the same (Rom. 3:8; Acts 21:18–22). Opposition to Paul in some forms of Jewish Christianity certainly continued long after Paul’s death (see below on the Ebionites and Jacobites; further Lüdemann 1989).

The letter of Jude

Like the letter of James, the letter of Jude is written in the name of one of Jesus’ brothers, not identified directly as such but as ‘brother of James’ (Jude 1; see Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3). With this ascribed authorship it is an obvious source for early Jewish Christianity. Most scholars, however, do not think that Jude himself wrote the letter, and many date it after the Jewish War (see Bauckham 1988: 3812–19). A date between 75–90 seems most likely.²⁴ Nevertheless, the letter does reveal a thoroughly Jewish background. It is clearly a Christian letter (Jude 1; 4; 17–25) but much of it is taken up with an attack on intruding ‘heretics’, who are clearly a reality and a perceived danger at the time when the author writes. This major section of the letter (Jude 5–16) uses scriptural types and texts to demonstrate that the false teachers of the present are precisely those whose existence and doom is foretold in scripture. Not only are the Jewish scriptures the basic source from which the writer builds his argument, but other Jewish writings and traditions (1 *Enoch*; *The Testament of Moses*) are echoed or quoted in the midrashic exegetical tapestry which Jude creates (see Bauckham 1988: 3800–804; 1990: 179–234). The letter appears to reflect a Palestinian-Jewish apocalyptic world-view (see Rowston 1975: 561–2; Bauckham 1983: 8–11; Charles 1993: 42–7).

It must also be pointed out, however, that Jude does not explicitly refer to the Jewish law, nor does it give any indication that it is addressed exclusively to Jewish

Christians. Indeed, Jude's admonitions to 'contend for the faith that was once and for all entrusted to the saints' (verse 3; cf. verse 20) and to 'remember the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ' (verse 17) seem to indicate not only a date sometime after the first generation of Christians have died but also that Jude was written to defend a developing 'apostolic' orthodoxy against perceived threats from 'heretics' (cf. Wisse 1972). It is not entirely clear, then, whether we should regard Jude as a document of early Jewish Christianity, or whether it reflects a time when Jewish apocalyptic exegesis is being taken up into the symbolic order of a developing Christian orthodoxy (see pp. 148–9 on 2 Peter).

The Gospel of Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew (cf. Figure 6.4), probably written around 80–90 CE, has long been recognized as the most Jewish of the canonical gospels and it is no surprise that the Matthean traditions are most prominent among the gospel traditions preserved and used by those groups later regarded as 'heretical' Jewish-Christian sects (see pp. 154–9). Matthew's is the gospel which most clearly seeks to demonstrate that Jesus is the fulfilment of the promises of the Jewish scriptures (Matt. 1:22; 2:15; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4) and seems to portray Jesus, in some ways, as a new Moses (Allison 1993). Especially relevant is the Matthean stress on the need for fulfilment of the law (5:17–20; unique to Matthew): believers in Jesus are not to abandon any parts of the law; on the contrary, they are to fulfil it perfectly, in intention as well as action.²⁵ Also revealing in this regard is the observation that Matthean redaction of certain Marcan passages evidences 'a tendency to play down Jesus' potentially critical remarks or actions in the Marcan account, or at least seek to justify them halakhically'.²⁶ Matthew's Jesus is also notable for his explicit restriction of the mission to the Jewish people only (Matt. 10:5–6, 15:24). Nevertheless, the fact that Jesus promises to be personally present with his people until the consummation of the age (Matt. 28:20; cf. 'Immanuel' meaning 'God with us' in Matt. 1:23) indicates clearly that he is much more than a law-giver like Moses.

All of this would seem to indicate a gospel written primarily for Jewish Christians who, while accepting Jesus as Messiah and Lord, continue to observe, and indeed are especially concerned in every respect to fulfil, the Jewish law. However, other factors must also be taken into account. One such factor is that counterbalancing the Matthean references to a mission restricted to Jews alone are the places where the good news is proclaimed to be for the whole world and not just for the Jewish people (28:19–20; and already hinted at in 2:1–2; 8:11–12). Another prominent feature of Matthew is its sharp polemic against the scribes and Pharisees, most notably in chapter 23 (see Stanton 1992: 146–68; Wilson 1995: 46–56; note also 27:25). Can a gospel be both Jewish and anti-Jewish, both exclusive and universal in its understanding of mission? It may be that the final form of Matthew's gospel reflects a time when more exclusive Jewish-Christian traditions had been brought together with those favouring the gentile mission, such that Matthew represents something of a reconciling of viewpoints (cf. Jones 1994: xvii–xxii). The sharply anti-Jewish – or rather, anti-Pharisaic – polemic of Matthew 23 is entirely comprehensible in terms of a situation of intense argument and power struggle between close relations, each

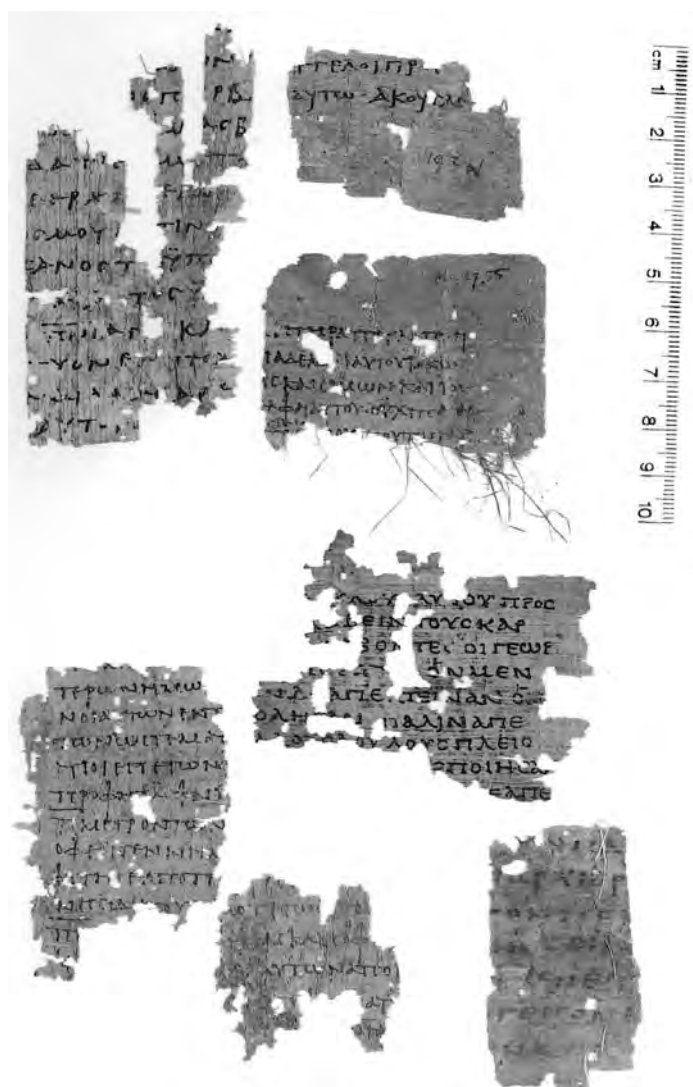


Figure 6.4 Some recently published papyrus fragments of the Gospel of Matthew, from Oxyrhynchus in Egypt (*P. Oxy.* 4401–6), now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Copyright Committee of the Egypt Exploration Society.²⁷

of whom believes the other to be fundamentally wrong in the claim they are making (cf. Stanton 1992: 146–68; Wilson 1995: 46–56). After the war of 66–74 CE the Pharisaic-rabbinic group gradually emerged as the strongest within Judaism, and, from the academy at Jamnia (Yavneh) in the post-war years, began to demonstrate its concern to formalize ‘orthodox’ Jewish belief and practice in what emerges as rabbinic Judaism.²⁸ The Christian groups represented a deviant threat. For the Jewish Christians, however, whom Matthew represents, the Pharisees represented the wrong way forward for Judaism, and so they are derided as hypocrites. Jesus is the one through whom God has fulfilled the promises of scripture. There was a power struggle, then, over who offered the right way forward, who had the integrity to demonstrate the correct way to interpret and fulfil the law.²⁹ For the Jewish Christians the answer was Jesus; for the leading circles of rabbinic Judaism it was the Pharisees/rabbis.

The Didache

Similarities between the Gospel of Matthew and the *Didache* have often been noted (see *Did.* 1.3–5; 8.2). These similarities may well reflect the *Didache*’s origin in the same locale as Matthew: Syria, perhaps more specifically Antioch (cf. Brown and Maier 1983). It is generally dated to the late first or very early second century. The *Didache* begins by outlining ‘two ways’: one of righteousness and life, the other of wickedness and death (*Did.* 1.1–6.1). A similar pattern of teaching is found in the epistle of *Barnabas* (18–20; see pp. 150–1), and almost certainly stems originally from Jewish sources (cf. 1QS 3.20–1; Carleton Paget 1994: 80–2). Of particular interest, however, are other parts of the *Didache*, which may reflect a Jewish-Christian ethos quite similar to that of the Matthean community. Nowhere in the document is any rejection of the Jewish law suggested, although some flexibility seems to be allowed: in 6.2–3, adherence to Jewish legal regulations appears to be encouraged, though anyone who cannot bear ‘the full yoke’ is urged to ‘do what they can’. The specific example of food regulations is then cited, with the comment that flexibility in this regard stops short of eating food that has been offered to idols. That is firmly prohibited. In other places, the *Didache* reflects the Christian adoption of Jewish practices (e.g. fasting, praying three times a day, and perhaps the form of baptism) along with a clear concern to differentiate Christian from Jewish behaviour. This concern is most obvious in regard to fasting, where, in order to distinguish themselves from ‘the hypocrites’ (the Jews; note the similarities to Matthew’s language here), the Christians are urged to fast on different days of the week (*Did.* 8.1; cf. also 8.2–3). An essentially Jewish-Christian form of faith and conduct seems to be evident here, with the distinction from Jewish practice being made not in the rejection of obedience to the law or Jewish tradition, but in varying the *form* of practice in order to be different.

Claiming the Jewish heritage: a symbolic route for Jewish Christianity

So far we have considered some mainly New Testament texts which seem to reflect a truly Jewish-Christian stance: acceptance of Jesus as Messiah by Jews, but continued and wholehearted adherence to the practice of their law. In the Gospel of Matthew, however, we have seen, alongside this Jewish-Christian stance which affirms the practice of the Jewish law, harsh polemic against the leaders of the Jewish community, the Pharisees (and, implicitly, their heirs, the emerging leaders of rabbinic Judaism).

Other texts, both canonical and non-canonical, sometimes classified as Jewish-Christian, depending on the definition adopted, bring a clearly Jewish-Christian heritage into what develops as 'orthodox' Christianity, comprising largely gentile members and in which the Jewish law is not observed fully, i.e. in its ritual and ceremonial aspects, which serve to create and affirm Jewish identity. In some of these texts there is also polemic, more or less explicit, against the actual practice of Judaism.

1 and 2 Peter

For F. C. Baur and those who have followed his interpretation of the division within early Christianity (see p. 136), Peter is the most prominent leading figure in the Jewish-Christian wing of the church. Texts bearing Peter's name, therefore, merit our attention. In fact, as with the letters of James and Jude, most scholars do not regard Peter as the author of the two New Testament letters which bear his name (in the case of 2 Peter, this judgement is virtually unanimous). 1 Peter most likely dates from around 75–95 CE, while 2 Peter is somewhat later, from the late first or early second century.³⁰

In the context of the present discussion, one of the most striking features of 1 Peter is the thoroughly Jewish way in which it describes the identity of those to whom it is sent. Among the writings of the New Testament it is one of the most saturated with citations from and allusions to the Jewish scriptures. 1 Pet. 2:4–10 in particular is full of scriptural citations and imagery: 'you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people claimed by God for his own' (2:9, etc.). The 'Jewish' character of 1 Peter is such that Eusebius, writing in the late third or early fourth century, took it to be a letter addressed specifically to 'the Hebrews', i.e. Jews (*HE* 3.1.2; 3.4.2). In fact, the addressees of 1 Peter are almost certainly exclusively, or primarily, gentile believers (see 1:14, 18; 2:10; 3:6; 4:3–4). Thus, in 1 Peter, thoroughly and definitively Jewish self-designations are taken over and claimed by the church, applied to gentile believers without any indication being given that another religious community also lays claim to these traditions (the lack of any such acknowledgement makes Peter's own authorship of the epistle unlikely, along with the other factors taken to indicate pseudonymity). There is no explicit anti-Jewish polemic here, but there is at least an implicit supersessionism: the Christian church has simply taken over, 'without remainder' (Achtmeier) the status and identity of Israel (see Achtmeier 1996: 69–72; Richardson 1969: 171–5).

Also absent from 1 Peter is any positive reference to the upholding of the Jewish law, such as we found in James and Matthew. Certainly the believers are frequently urged to live a good and holy life, based on the scriptural assertion that God is holy (1 Pet. 1:15). But there are no grounds on which to argue that this letter reflects a Jewish-Christian stance with regard to Jewish practice. The disputes about the basis on which Jewish and gentile believers are to share fellowship together, and the regulations which are incumbent upon the latter, seem not to be a pressing concern.

Alongside the 'Jewish' character of 1 Peter, one must also note the letter's indebtedness to various strands of early Christian tradition: gospel sayings, credal formulae, Pauline theology. Indeed, 1 Peter, clearly written from Rome (5:13), represents something of what Baur saw as the synthesis of Jewish and gentile Christianity in Rome. Not only is there a weaving together of traditions from various strands of early Christianity, but, especially notable here, there is also a detaching of the symbolic order of Judaism from Jewish practice. In other words, 1 Peter claims a definitively Jewish identity for a body of people who do not live as Jews. Such a strategy is, of course, not unique to 1 Peter. Paul's claim that the true children of Abraham are those who have faith in Christ, and *not* those who are circumcised and obey the law (Gal. 3:6–4:31; Rom. 4:1ff.), is a decisive theological step in just such a direction. But perhaps 1 Peter, associated as it is with the name of Peter and with circles who honoured him, also represents an important milestone along the route whereby some traditions of Jewish Christianity were embraced and valued within the symbolic order of developing orthodox Christianity. That Rome was an important location for such a development will be seen from the other documents which evidence a similar trajectory, which I will now discuss.

If some may be inclined to doubt that 1 Peter represents a reconciling of Petrine and Pauline viewpoints, an interweaving of various strands of Christian tradition, surely 2 Peter provides an even clearer example. While clearly aware of a previous letter written in Peter's name, the author of 2 Peter can hardly be the same person who wrote 1 Peter, though the letter most probably originates in the same geographical location, Rome. One of the most obvious literary features of 2 Peter is that it takes up and adapts much of the material from Jude 4–18 in its own polemic against false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1–3:3; see table in Horrell 1998: 141). Thus the Palestinian-Jewish style of exegesis which Jude employed to identify the intruders as the very people predicted and consigned to doom in scripture is taken up into a later writing of Roman Christianity. Moreover, 2 Peter makes clear and explicit use of gospel tradition (1:17–18) and, significantly, makes positive reference to 'our beloved brother Paul' and his letters, which are clearly being valued as scripture (3:15–16). Hence, while associated with the name of Peter (even using a more Jewish form of his name: Simeon Peter [1:1]) and incorporating what may be termed Jewish-Christian materials (from Jude), 2 Peter is not a document of Jewish Christianity in the sense in which we have defined Jewish Christianity. Rather, like 1 Peter, it represents the nascent Christian orthodoxy of Rome, into which the symbolic world of Jewish Christianity has been incorporated. Similar comments could be made, though space does not permit discussion, regarding 1 *Clement* and the *Shepherd of Hermas* (cf. Daniélou 1964: 36–9, 43–5).

Hebrews

Another New Testament writing often attributed to the Roman church (cf. Heb. 13:24; Lindars 1991: 17–18) and dated somewhere between 60 and 100 CE (Attridge 1989: 9), is the so-called letter to the Hebrews. It is not clear from the letter whether its addressees are Jewish Christians, gentile Christians, or a mixed community (Attridge 1989: 10–13). It is certainly the case that the letter is concerned to bolster the faith and commitment of Christians who are tempted to lapse in their faith and abandon their meetings together in the face of a degree of hostility and oppression (Heb. 6:1–12; 10:23–5; 10:32–12:13, etc., note 12:4). These Christians may perhaps have been Jewish Christians tempted to return to the faith and practice of Judaism, or gentiles tempted to proselytize (there is certainly evidence that such a turning to Judaism was sometimes an attraction to gentile Christian converts: Gal. 3:1–3; 5:1–12; Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 47; see Wilson 1995: 159–67; Hvalvik 1996). What is absolutely clear is that the letter itself is full of quotations and imagery from the Jewish scriptures but that its overriding concern is to show how Christianity is superior to Judaism. Christianity is the perfect and real fulfilment of the imperfect shadow which preceded it. Christ is superior to prophets and angels (Heb. 1:1ff.), to Moses (3:3), and to the levitical priesthood (4:14–10:25). The Jewish law and cultic system are only a shadow of the reality that has come in Christ; they can never produce true perfection and forgiveness (10:1). Christ is the mediator of a ‘new covenant’, which has rendered the old one ‘obsolete’ (8:13; cf. 10:29; 12:24); the Jewish cult and the Jewish way of life (13:9) are no longer to be practised. Hebrews, then, is a classic example of a presentation of the Christian faith in thoroughly Jewish terms: Christ’s person and achievement are explained in terms drawn from the Jewish scriptures and specifically from the Jewish cult (his blood shed, etc.: see 9:1–28), yet at the same time this functions as a claim that Christianity has superseded Judaism. The earthly realities of the Jewish cult find their fulfilment in the spiritual, heavenly cult in which Christ is both high priest and sacrificial offering. Once more, the symbolic ‘world’ of Judaism is wholeheartedly adopted by a Christianity in which the actual practice of Judaism is rejected. The concrete practices of Judaism, especially in its cult and law, are seen as crude and imperfect precursors of the heavenly reality now accessible through Christ.

The letter of Barnabas

A not dissimilar supersessionist agenda is evident in the so-called *Epistle of Barnabas*,³¹ which probably dates from the very end of the first century and comes from Alexandria, Egypt.³² Like Hebrews, a major concern of *Barnabas* is to demonstrate that the true fulfilment of God’s covenant, promises, and salvation, is found in Christ and not in the practice of Judaism. This concern almost certainly reflects the real ‘risk’ of some Christians being attracted to Judaism (*Barn* 3.6; see Horbury 1998: 133–40; Hvalvik 1996), perhaps particularly in view of the possibility of the temple being rebuilt (cf. *Barn.* 16.4), though whether such people were Jewish Christians or Judaizing gentiles is not entirely clear. Where *Barnabas* goes further than Hebrews is in claiming that the Jews, in a sense, never were the covenant

people (cf. *Barn.* 4.6–8; 14.1–4): because of their sinfulness, they misunderstood the teachings of Moses and falsely believed that regulations concerning food, circumcision and sabbath observance were meant to be taken literally. In fact, *Barnabas* claims, they never were meant to be taken in this way, but they symbolize moral and spiritual teachings (*Barn.* 9.1–10.12; 15.1–9). Similarly, the sacrificial cult, the deeds of Moses, and so on, typologically refer to the achievements of Christ (7.1–8.7; 12.1–11). Even the Temple was not meant to be a physical building (16.1–2): the true temple is the Christian community, in which God really dwells (16.8).

In both *Barnabas* and Hebrews, then, we see a Christianity determined to claim the Jewish heritage exclusively for itself, a Christianity which claims the symbolic world of Judaism as its own, but rejects the particular practices which Judaism had made central. The motivation for this denigration of Judaism and of Jewish practice is at least in part the attraction of Judaism to significant numbers of Christian converts, whether originally Jewish or gentile, and whether or not there was specifically ‘missionary’ activity on the part of the Jews. In one sense, therefore, such early Christian documents, rich as they are in Jewish tradition, are clearly Jewish in character; in another, they are anti-Jewish. Certainly they reject the idea of continuing to live as Jews, following Jewish practice. Thus, on a praxis-based definition, they do not represent early Jewish Christianity.

Increasing conflict: the *Birkat ha-minim* and the Bar Kochba revolt

If the texts examined immediately above show something of how the developing Christian orthodoxy claimed its Jewish heritage, while at the same time opposing the practice of Judaism and thus rejecting the legitimacy of the Jewish-Christian stance, then it is also significant to consider the ways in which Jewish Christians may have come to be marginalized from the Jewish side too. In the aftermath of the war of 66–74 CE the leading circles of Pharisaic rabbis who gathered at Jamnia (see Figure 6.2) in the school founded by Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai (see Schäfer 1979; Jagersma 1985: 151) sought over time to promote and establish a form of Jewish (rabbinic) orthodoxy, such that various forms of Jewish sectarianism, including, but not only, Jewish Christianity, were gradually excluded from what some scholars call ‘normative’ Judaism (see pp. 145–7, with notes 28–9).

An important moment in the history of this developing orthodoxy is marked by the introduction into synagogue liturgy of the so-called *birkat ha-minim* (the benediction concerning the heretics), the twelfth of the *Eighteen Benedictions*. There is considerable debate concerning the original form of this twelfth benediction, to whom it referred, and when it was introduced.³³ However, it does seem most likely that some form of curse against heretics was introduced towards the end of the first century (as the Babylonian Talmud records; van der Horst 1994: 99). Its main purpose was probably to strengthen Jewish unity, the lack of which had proved so disastrous in the war against Rome of 66–74 CE. Thus the target of its attack was not specifically or exclusively Christians, but it is most likely that Jewish Christians, and possibly Christians generally,³⁴ were included among those cursed as *minim*, heretics (see Alexander 1992: 8–9; van der Horst 1994). Since the ground-breaking work of J. L. Martyn (1968), the Gospel of John has generally been seen as clear New

Testament evidence for this effective exclusion of Christians from the synagogues (see John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2), while Justin Martyr provides the strongest second-century evidence for such practice (see Horbury 1998: 72, 102–8; and pp. 152–4, this volume).³⁵

Also central to the twelfth benediction in which heretics were cursed is the prayer that the ‘insolent kingdom’ (i.e. Rome) may ‘be quickly uprooted, in our days’ (see van der Horst 1994: 99). Along with strengthening unity and uniformity within Judaism, then, the prayer also expresses Jewish hopes for the rapid downfall of Rome. These hopes seemed as though they might be realized when the Jewish leader Simon ben Kosiba emerged and was hailed by many as Messiah (he came to be called Bar Kochba, ‘son of the star’; cf. Num. 24:17). Not only would Jewish Christians living in Palestine have been naturally reluctant to hail anyone other than Jesus as Messiah, but they would probably have been reluctant to support the nationalistic fervour which culminated in the second Jewish revolt against Rome in 132 CE. According to Justin Martyr (1 *Apol.* 31.6), in the Jewish revolt Bar Kochba ordered that Christians be severely punished, unless they denied the Messiahship of Jesus (see Bauckham 1998: 228, who argues that this scenario is reflected in the *Apocalypse of Peter*, which he regards as a Palestinian Jewish-Christian work written during the Bar Kochba revolt). With Jewish Christians cursed as heretics in synagogue worship, and failing to support the Jewish revolt against Rome, their exclusion from the religious community of Israel was doubly confirmed (see Bauckham 1998; Alexander 1992: 22).

JEWISH-CHRISTIAN GROUPS IN THE SECOND CENTURY AND BEYOND

Despite their increasing marginalization from both the emerging Christian and Jewish orthodoxies, Jewish-Christian groups continued to exist at least until the fourth century (see Figure 6.5). The evidence for these groups and their beliefs and practices is unfortunately sparse, stemming from sources which are not uncontentious. Apart from the slender archaeological evidence (see Taylor 1993), there are the accounts in the Church Fathers, for whom the Jewish Christians are heretics, and the Jewish-Christian writings believed to be embedded in later texts such as Epiphanius’ *Panarion* and the *Pseudoclementine Homilies* and *Recognitions* (Wilson 1995: 143–4).³⁶ Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence to enable us to say something about the distinctive emphases of some of these groups, to deduce that they were in existence in the second century as well as later, and, equally importantly, to infer some continuity between them and the varieties of Jewish Christianity reflected in the New Testament.

The evidence of Justin Martyr

Important evidence concerning the existence of Jewish Christians in the latter half of the second century and their difficult relationship with the church is found in Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho* (written c. 160 CE).³⁷ Justin’s (fictional?) dialogue

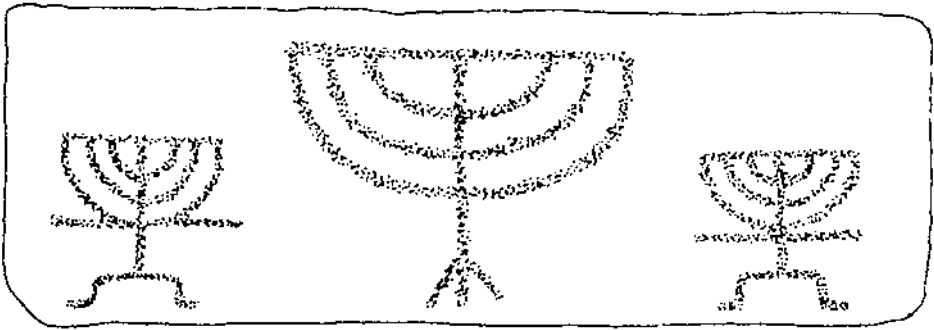
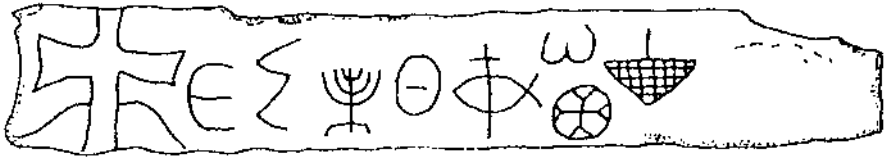


Figure 6.5 Inscriptions on masonry from the Roman-Byzantine village of Farj (see Figure 6.2), probably dating from around the fourth century CE and which, in their combination of Jewish symbols (especially the menorah) and Christian ones (especially the cross), may possibly be the work of the Nazarenes (Taylor 1993: 39–41). From Taylor (1993), by permission of Oxford University Press.

partner, Trypho the Jew, asks about the fate of those who profess Jesus as Christ, yet continue to observe the Mosaic Law (*Dial.* 46.1; 47.1). Justin replies that they will be saved, as long as they do not seek to persuade gentile converts to adopt and practise Jewish rites (probably including circumcision; note the word *peritumêthentas* in *Dial.* 47). Gentiles who have been persuaded to Judaize will also, Justin expects, be saved, as long as they do not deny Christ. But gentiles who have turned to the Mosaic Law and abandoned the profession of Christ will not be saved, and nor will Jews who do not believe in Christ, especially those who curse Christians in their synagogues (*Dial.* 47). In the following chapters (*Dial.* 48–9), Justin also refers to Christians who believe in Christ but deny his divine pre-existence, regarding him as of merely human origin. It is most plausible, though not indisputable, to link this view also with certain Jewish-Christian groups, specifically with the Ebionites (see pp. 154–5).

Justin provides clear evidence, then, of the continued existence of Jewish Christians, some of whom he accepts within the boundaries of the church (those who do not persuade gentiles to adopt Jewish rites) and others whom he does not (those who

urge Jewish practice on the gentiles). He also reveals that his opinion with regard to the inclusion of the former category of Jewish Christian is not universally accepted. There are some Christians, he says, who 'boldly refuse to have conversation or meals with such persons' (*Dial.* 47). Justin's view, then, may have been more tolerant than that of many of his Christian contemporaries; certainly, after Justin, it is only as 'heretics' that we subsequently hear of Jewish Christians – from Irenaeus' comments on the Ebionites onwards (*Adversus Haereses* 1.26.2, written c. 182–8; Carleton Paget 1999: 750).

The diversity among Jewish Christians which Justin hints at is further revealed in later sources, although the evidence does not permit many clear distinctions to be drawn between different groups; the evidence of the heresiologists, notably Epiphanius, is not always reliable, and the term 'Ebionite' had become a rather general and negative label for heretics. Moreover, links or similarities between Jewish-Christian and Samaritan or gnostic groups, all of which are included in Epiphanius' catalogue of heretical groups, seem in some cases possible, though hard to specify.³⁸ In what follows, then, I shall follow the helpful taxonomy set out by Stephen Wilson (1995: 148–59), while recognizing, as Wilson does, that such a scheme inevitably involves some crude generalization, and may be questioned at certain points.

Ebionites

Irenaeus is the first to use the name 'Ebionites' to describe a Jewish-Christian group, though it is possible that the name has earlier origins as a self-description adopted by some Jewish Christians in Palestine (the Hebrew term *ebionim* means 'the poor', and was used at Qumran as a self-designation).³⁹ According to Irenaeus, the Ebionites denied the virgin birth (*Adv. Haer.* 3.21.1; cf. Justin *Dial.* 48), adhered to the demands of the Jewish law, including circumcision, used only the Gospel of Matthew, and rejected Paul (cf. 3.15.1), whom they regarded as an apostate from the law. They were concerned to interpret the (Jewish) prophets, and 'adored' Jerusalem 'as if it were the house of God' (*Adv. Haer.* 1.26.2).⁴⁰

Later writers add further information to this list, though some of it is almost certainly spurious: Tertullian, for example, adopts the heresiologists' typical tendency to associate all heresies with a named founder, and contrasts the heresy of Marcion with that of 'Ebion' (*Haer.* 33.11). The most lengthy report comes from the extensive survey of some 80 heresies in the work entitled *Panarion* ('medicine chest')⁴¹ compiled by Epiphanius (c. 315–403 CE), bishop of Salamis in the fourth century. In *Panarion* 30, Epiphanius describes the Ebionite sect, often confirming what we already know from Irenaeus and others, including their 'low', adoptionist, Christology (see also Eusebius *HE* 3.27.2), but adding further interesting information. For example, he reports that the sect began when Christians from Jerusalem fled to Pella at the time of the capture of Jerusalem (*Pan.* 30.2.7) and locates them in this Transjordanian region (see Figure 6.2 above). Also significant is his report of their avoidance of contact with foreigners (i.e. non-Jews), their ritual washings and their insistence on marriage (*Pan.* 30.2.6; 30.18.2). They apparently justified their insistence on circumcision by appealing to a gospel saying: 'It is enough for the disciple to be like his master' (Matt. 10:25). 'Christ was circumcised', they say, 'so

you be circumcised' (*Pan* 30.26.2). However, the Ebionites rejected sacrifice (*Pan*. 30.16.5) and were vegetarians, and adapted their Gospel traditions and scriptural interpretation to support this stance – one which Epiphanius ridicules and strongly opposes (*Pan* 30.15.3–4; 30.16.5; 30.22.3–8). The so-called Gospel of the Ebionites, known only from quotations in Epiphanius, records that John the Baptist ate 'pancakes' and wild honey, a clever alteration from the Greek *akrides* (locusts; Matt. 3:4) to *enkrides* (pancakes) thus making John a vegetarian too. This Gospel, which the Ebionites, according to Epiphanius, call 'According to Matthew' or the 'Hebrew Gospel' (*Pan*. 30.13.2; cf. 30.3.7), seems, from the limited evidence we have, to have existed in Greek and to have consisted of some kind of harmony of the synoptic Gospels (see Howard 1988; Elliott 1993: 3–6; also see p. 158, this volume). According to Epiphanius, because of their view of Jesus as of human origin, born of Joseph and Mary, they remove the genealogy in Matthew, and begin their gospel: 'It happened in the days of Herod, king of Judaea, in the time of the high priest Caiaphas, that there came someone named John baptizing' (*Pan*. 30.14.2).

Investigation of the broadly Ebionite grouping could proceed further; with examination, for example, of the so-called *Kerygmata Petrou*, an earlier writing incorporated in the *Pseudoclementine Homilies*, which some regard as Ebionite in origin (see Wilson 1995: 150–2). Similarly, the *Ascents of James* (see pp. 155–7) might perhaps be Ebionite. Also relevant, though even more obscure, are the Elchaisites, a sect of Jewish-(Christian?) origin, probably influenced by the Ebionites, but about whom little can be established with certainty.⁴² However, enough has been done to allow us to see that the Ebionites represent Jewish Christians who acknowledge Jesus as Messiah, but hold a low, adoptionist, Christology, adhere to the Jewish Law, including circumcision, avoid contact with gentiles and repudiate Paul and his mission.

How far back may the Ebionites' origins be traced? Certainly we may locate their earliest roots ultimately among the Jerusalem Christians, specifically those who opposed Paul, insisted on circumcision for all members of God's people, and remained separate from non-Jewish believers. But their distinctive emphases, practices, Christological beliefs and so on, developed over time, and their rejection of sacrifice distances them somewhat from the earliest Jewish Christians, who loyally attended the temple (Acts 3:1); the Ebionites may even have originated from a split among the Nazarene ranks, after the flight to Pella (cf. Pritz 1988: 38–9; further on pp. 157–9, this volume).⁴³

Jacobites

We have already seen the importance of James as a leading figure in Jewish-Christian circles and have briefly considered the character of the New Testament letter written in his name. Heightened reverence and regard for James is evident in the *Ascents of James*, a Jewish-Christian writing incorporated, like the *Kerygmata Petrou*, in the Pseudoclementine corpus (specifically, in *Recognitions* 1.33–71 [or 27–71]), and usually dated in the latter half of the second century. Epiphanius refers to an Ebionite document called the *Ascents of James* (*Pan*. 30.16.7–9), which is generally identified with this section of the Pseudoclementine corpus, though the identification has recently been disputed (Jones 1995: 35, 146–8). Whatever the origins

of this text, it does seem clearly to be Jewish-Christian in character (Jones 1995: 164–7).

In this source, James is indisputably the most outstanding and important leader of the early church; he was ordained bishop of Jerusalem by Jesus himself (*Rec.* 1.43.3; 1.68.2, etc.). James led a highly successful mission to the Palestinian Jews, so much so that, according to the legendary account, the Jewish priests began to fear that the whole populace would be converted (*Rec.* 1.43.1). Notably, the source claims that the only difference between the Christian message propagated by James, and the Jewish faith which the priests represent, concerns belief in Jesus, who is apparently regarded by the Christians as the prophet promised by Moses, ‘the eternal Christ’ (1.43.1–2). The Jewish sacrificial cult, however, is apparently superseded by the practice of baptism, having been instituted in the first place only by way of concession to the people (1.36.1–1.39.3). By contrast, the Jewish Law is spoken of positively (1.33.3–5; 1.35.2; 1.60.4) and Jesus is described as a ‘teacher of the law’ (1.62.3), suggesting, according to Robert Van Voorst (1989: 138), ‘that the community of the AJ [Ascents of James] was law-observant’. The gentile mission is accepted, and is regarded as a result of Jewish rejection of the message (1.42.1), but it only began, apparently, after the Temple was destroyed (1.64.2). Whether, and to what degree, gentile converts are expected to adopt Jewish legal and ritual observance is not discussed. Opposition to Paul among this group (he is described as ‘that hostile man’) is generally seen in the account of his persecution of Christians and attack upon James (1.70.1–8; 1.71.3–4). However, the depiction appears to be of the pre-Christian Paul and is probably dependent on Acts (8:1; 9:1).⁴⁴

Because of its ‘obsession’ with James, Stephen Wilson takes the *Ascents of James* as representative of a distinct, ‘Jacobite’, grouping within early Jewish Christianity; it is the focus on James, Wilson suggests, that most distinguishes this grouping from the Ebionite tradition (1995: 155). Apart from the prominence of James, a belief in Christ’s pre-existence (see Van Voorst 1989: 164) and acceptance of the gentile mission may also distinguish the writer(s) of the *Ascents* from the Ebionites. On the other hand, the rejection of sacrifice in both the Gospel of the Ebionites and the *Ascents* (see Van Voorst 1989: 166–7), along with Hegesippus’ description of James, like the Ebionites, as abstaining from meat (in Eusebius *HE* 2.23.5), may suggest that the groups should not be neatly differentiated. The Ebionites (though not only the Ebionites) may well have held James in high regard, just as they may also have done with Peter, if the *Kerygmata Petrou* is Ebionite (see p. 155).

Clearly the *Ascents of James* contains legendary and hagiographic development of the historical facts about James, leader of the Jerusalem church. Nevertheless, a degree of continuity within the circles who focused their allegiance on James should not be overlooked. Wilson points to parallels between the *Ascents* and the letter of James: ‘an emphasis on keeping the law, a modest Christology, anti-Paulinism, and, above all, invocation of the central and authoritative role of James’ (Wilson 1995: 154). Also noteworthy is the focus on James in the passage from the Gospel according to the Hebrews quoted by Jerome (*de Viris Illustribus* 2).⁴⁵ Again, the roots of such groups of ‘Jacobites’, if that is a legitimate label, may be traced back ultimately to the earliest Jerusalem community and specifically to the circle around James, brother of Jesus. James, we recall, apparently supported the Gentile mission while

upholding observance of the law and requiring that Gentile converts obey a minimum of Jewish legal prescription.

*Nazarenes*⁴⁶

The name 'Nazarene' may well be the earliest term used to label followers of Jesus. According to Matthew, Luke-Acts, and John,⁴⁷ Jesus was called 'the Nazarene' (*ho nazôraios*) during his public ministry. Matthew's attempt to show that this name is a fulfilment of that spoken through the prophets, 'he shall be called a Nazarene' (Matt. 2:23), is notoriously difficult, since no prophet actually says quite such a thing, but surely reflects Matthew's concern to demonstrate that this feature of Jesus' identity, along with others, is a sign of his being the promised Messiah. In Acts 24:5 we find Paul described as a member of 'the sect of the Nazarenes' (*hê tôn Nazôraîôn hairesis*), a label which apparently designates Jewish followers of Jesus as a 'sect' or 'party' within Judaism — characterized pre-70 CE by sectarian diversity (see pp. 142–3). The earliest (Jewish) Christians, then, may well have been known as 'Nazarenes'.⁴⁸ However, with the inclusion of gentiles into the church, the Greek term *Christianoi*, 'Christians', became the dominant label (cf. Pritz 1988: 14–17; Wilson 1995: 156).

The determination to exclude the Nazarenes from the religious community of Israel after 70 CE is probably evident in the benediction against all *minim* (heretics; see p. 151) and certainly in the introduction of the term *notzrim* (Nazarenes) into this benediction. There is considerable debate and uncertainty as to when exactly *notzrim* was added to the benediction and to whom exactly it referred. While it may have included all Christians, it certainly designated Jewish Christians, and was most probably in use, at least in certain locations, well before the fourth century, possibly from the late first or early second century.⁴⁹

In Christian sources, however, after Acts the name 'Nazarenes' hardly reappears until Epiphanius' *Panarion*, written in 376 CE (Pritz 1988: 15), where it designates a group of 'heretics' (see Mimouni 1998a: 223–6). As with the Ebionites, Epiphanius provides the most extensive source of information about the Nazarenes, even though some of his assertions are highly doubtful. From *Panarion* 29, devoted to the Nazarenes, the following picture emerges: Others named them 'Nazarenes', but they accept the name, since Jesus himself was called the 'Nazarene' (*Pan.* 29.6.7). They use the whole of both Old and New Testaments (29.7.2, 4) and read both the Jewish scriptures and their Gospel (described as the Gospel of Matthew) in Hebrew (29.7.4; 29.9.4). They believe in the resurrection, in God the creator, and in his child Jesus Christ (29.7.3). They also observe the Law of Moses. Indeed, Epiphanius encapsulates neatly the essentially Jewish-Christian character of their faith and practice: 'In this alone do they differ from the Jews and the Christians: from the Jews in believing in Christ, and from the Christians in being bound still to the law, to circumcision and the Sabbath and the rest' (*Pan.* 29.7.5). Hence, to Epiphanius the Christian, they are 'Jews and nothing else' (29.7.1). Yet he also reports that they are hated by the Jews, and cursed three times daily in their synagogues, a clear reference to the *birkat ha-minim* (*Pan.* 29.9.2–3).

Epiphanius also supplies important, and plausible, information about the origins of the Nazarenes. He locates them in the Transjordanian areas of Beroea in Coele

Syria, in the Decapolis near Pella, and in Cochaba, stating that the sect began when the disciples fled from Jerusalem to Pella (*Pan.* 29.7.7–8). Although Epiphanius reports that the sect *began* in the Transjordan, his own linking of the Nazarenes with the disciples fleeing from Jerusalem suggests a continuity between the pre-70 Jerusalem Christian Jews and the later Nazarenes (de Boer 1998: 246). Epiphanius also claims that the Ebionite ‘heresy’, specifically their ‘founder’ Ebion, came from among the Nazarenes (*Pan.* 30.1.1; 30.2.1). We have already noted that the idea of a person named Ebion as founder of the Ebionites seems unlikely to be true. Nevertheless, Ray Pritz makes the plausible suggestion that Epiphanius may here rightly indicate that the Ebionite sect actually originated from a split among the Nazarenes after the flight to Pella, perhaps over leadership or Christology (Pritz 1988: 37–9, 108).

Indeed, a major difference between the Nazarenes and the Ebionites concerns Christology. While Epiphanius is unsure whether or not the Nazarenes hold an orthodox Christology (*Pan.* 29.7.6), Jerome (*Ep.* 112.13) confirms that they do (Pritz 1988: 53–5). Such a divergence among Jewish Christians over Christology may be hinted at in Justin (*Dial.* 48), and is certainly reported by Origen (*Contra Celsum* 5.61) and Eusebius (*HE* 3.27.2–6), though both of these writers regard the difference as occurring between two kinds of ‘Ebionites’ (probably because this was the more common heretical label for Jewish Christians). From Jerome’s writings it is also possible to confirm that the Nazarenes accept Paul and endorse the Gentile mission (*Commentary On Isaiah* 9.1–4; Pritz 1988: 64), again in distinction from the Ebionites. Jerome also provides most of the evidence for a so-called ‘Gospel of the Nazarenes’, a Hebrew (probably Aramaic, in fact) gospel which Jerome reports having translated into Greek and Latin (*de Vir. Ill.* 2). Jerome, as do other patristic Christian writers, refers to this gospel as the Gospel according to the Hebrews, sometimes adding, ‘which the Nazarenes read’. Epiphanius states that the Nazarenes have the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew (*Pan.* 29.9.4) and the Nazarenes’ Aramaic Gospel seems to have the closest relationship to what we know as the Gospel of Matthew. Indeed, some New Testament manuscripts of Matthew contain marginal textual notes that refer to *To Ioudaikon* (The Jewish [Gospel]; Elliott 1993: 4). The relationships between the various quotations and references to the ‘Gospel according to the Hebrews’ in patristic writers is a complex matter, but modern scholars are more or less agreed on distinguishing three ‘gospels’: the Gospel of the Ebionites (see p. 155), apparently existing in Greek and containing some kind of harmony of all three synoptic gospels; the Gospel according to the Hebrews, also in Greek and used by Jewish Christians in Egypt; and the Gospel of the Nazarenes, which was preserved in Aramaic and was probably most closely related to Matthew, though precisely how closely remains open to debate (see Elliott 1993: 3–6; Klijn 1988). Pritz suggests that all these Jewish-Christian gospels may have stemmed from one original Hebrew Gospel, associated with the name Matthew, which was ‘variously adapted, expanded, edited, and used by the different streams of Jewish Christianity’ (Pritz 1988: 85).

The Nazarenes, then, share the essential features of Jewish Christianity with the other groupings we have considered: belief in Jesus as Messiah and continued adherence to the Jewish Law. They differ notably from the Ebionites in their orthodox

Christology, their acceptance of Paul and the Gentile mission. Indeed, their only divergence from Christian orthodoxy is that they adhere to the Jewish Law. The Jacobites (see pp. 155–7), if they were a distinguishable group, perhaps fall somewhere in between, accepting a Gentile mission but repudiating Paul. As Wilson notes, it is tempting to align each of these three groups with the diversity of opinion evident among the earliest Jewish Christians, though such a neat categorization could too easily imply both clearer continuity and tidier distinctions than was actually the case (see pp. 138–41; Wilson 1995: 157). The evidence does not permit clear boundaries and neat distinctions to be drawn. Too many questions remain: What was the relationship between the Nazarenes and the Ebionites? Did the latter split from the former, and if so, when and where? Were the Jacobites in any way an identifiable grouping? What was the relationship between the various forms of what patristic writers call the Gospel of the Hebrews? What seems clear is that patristic writers know of at least two basic types of Jewish Christians, one of which is essentially orthodox and is criticized only for adherence to the Jewish law (Nazarenes), the other of which is condemned also for its denial of orthodox, incarnational Christology (Ebionites). Moreover, while there is considerable development and diversification of belief and practice among Jewish-Christian groups, it also seems justifiable to see some continuity between the ‘heretical sects’ identified by the patristic heresiologists and the earliest Jewish Christians.

CONCLUSION: THE FATE OF JEWISH CHRISTIANITY

If it is right to see a degree of continuity between the first (Jewish) Christians and the sects condemned as heretical in the fourth century, then clearly the story we have been attempting to revisit is one in which those who were originally central to, indeed constitutive of, Christianity were later excluded and denounced as heretics. The successors of Jesus the Nazarene and Paul of the party of the Nazarenes were the ‘heretical’ Nazarenes denounced by Epiphanius. Some of the later Jewish Christians clearly held beliefs outside of what came to be regarded as Christian orthodoxy (the Ebionites), while others (the Nazarenes) seem to have been entirely orthodox in every respect except for adhering to the Jewish Law. The Nazarenes’ apparent orthodoxy may indeed explain why they were not denounced as heretical, until the church acquired its status as dominant religion of the empire in the fourth century.

The Jewish-Christian heritage – the symbolic world of Judaism – was, as we have seen, claimed by the emerging orthodox church. In this sense Jewish Christianity was taken up into the developing institution. But while Judaism’s symbolic order was adopted, its practices were rejected and ridiculed, and rites such as circumcision and sacrifice were spiritualized and Christianized. In claiming itself as the covenant people of God, the church laid claim to have superseded Judaism, and denounced the Jews for their unbelief, and for continuing to live in error. A history of anti-Judaism which has been examined extensively in recent years was one result. The result for Jewish Christians, of course, was rejection and marginalization by the church; their continued practice of Jewish legal observance could not be tolerated, even if they held otherwise orthodox Christian beliefs.

From the Jewish side too, the Jewish-Christian stance came to be regarded as increasingly intolerable. The gradual development of a rabbinic orthodoxy demanded the exclusion of heretics and sectarians, among whom Jewish Christians were prominent. The cursing of (Jewish) Christians in the synagogues and their punishment during Bar Kochba's revolt reveal this process of exclusion in practice.

Consequently, with the victory of rabbinic Judaism as orthodox Judaism by the third century (see Alexander 1992) and the victory of Christianity as the religion of the empire in the fourth, the fate of Jewish Christianity was sealed. The groups which we have examined apparently disappeared in the fourth or possibly early fifth century. They were, in a nutshell, 'abandoned on both sides for being neither one thing nor the other' (Wilson 1995: 167).

Some scholars using social-scientific methods in the study of early Christianity have compared the early Christian movement with the modern phenomenon of a religious 'sect'.⁵⁰ Our study of early Jewish Christianity suggests some relevant observations and qualifications with regard to this perspective. First, it is probably misleading to refer to Jewish Christianity before 70 CE as a religious 'sect', if that is meant in the sense of a close-knit separatist community in tension with a more or less monolithic 'parent' body. On the one hand, the whole of Judaism pre-70 seems to be characterized by sectarian diversity, such that the Messianic Jews known (probably) as Nazarenes were only one among a number of varied groups. On the other hand, the early Jewish Christians, unlike some other Jews who withdrew to their community at Qumran, remained involved in the ritual, cultic, and liturgical life of Judaism and were not a tightly bound sectarian movement. Second, after 70 CE, though the process took several centuries, both Judaism and Christianity moulded their diverse traditions into an increasingly powerful orthodoxy, especially powerful, of course, on the part of Christianity. It was these dominant orthodoxies which took the initiative in excluding 'heretics' and thus in *creating* a sectarian status for groups which were regarded as deviant. In other words, in some sense, the initiative for forging a separatist sectarian identity, over against a 'parent' religious body, came not from the group which 'broke away' but, rather, from the centre. If we asked the detective's question of the Jewish Christians, 'Did they jump or were they pushed?', the answer would seem to be the latter: they were pushed from both sides.

A suitable epitaph is in fact provided by Jerome (*Ep.* 112.13) who writes of the Nazarenes something that was a reality for all Jewish Christians: wanting to be both Jews and Christians, they end up being neither (*dum uolunt et Iudaei esse et Christiani, nec Iudaei sunt nec Christiani*). If we recall the vision of Jesus, in so far as we can know it, a loyal Jew who looked for the establishment of God's kingdom (in which gentiles might perhaps also share), then it is hard to deny some sympathy for the early Jewish Christians who in some sense kept precisely that vision alive, but were denied a place in either Judaism or Christianity.⁵¹

NOTES

- 1 This is a somewhat controversial statement, since the role and self-understanding of Jesus continue to be vigorously debated. That Jesus was a Jew who saw his mission primarily in relation to the Jewish people, however, is virtually undisputable (cf. Sanders 1985; Charlesworth 1991, etc.).
- 2 For recent work on Jewish Christianity see Carleton Paget (1999) – which I have been grateful to read in proof form – and Mimouni (1998b) – which I have not yet seen. A most valuable collection of the relevant patristic evidence is Klijn and Reinink (1973).
- 3 Cf. Carleton Paget (1999: 731, 733). Jerome comes close to such an appellation in his Commentary on Zechariah (*In Zachariam* 3.14.10); see Mimouni (1992: 178, 184; 1998a: 209).
- 4 See Baur (1831), Lüdemann (1989: 1–32), Hill (1992: 5–6), Taylor (1990: 314). This view of early Christianity has recently been revived by Goulder (1994a).
- 5 Wilson (1995: 224) comments that Daniélou offers ‘a definition, it is now realized, so capacious as to be meaningless’. See further Taylor (1990: 313–14; 1993: 22), Carleton Paget (1999: 736–9).
- 6 See, e.g., Bauckham (1995: 473), Taylor (1990: 314; 1993: 20–1), Mimouni (1992: 184), Carleton Paget (1999: 740).
- 7 This qualification is important in order to indicate that the denial of Jesus’ divinity – such as characterized the Ebionites (see pp. 154–5) – is not, *contra* Schoeps, definitive of Jewish Christianity.
- 8 Due to the lack of evidence, and the focus on Jerusalem in Acts, it is difficult to say much about early Christian groups elsewhere in Palestine, specifically Galilee (cf. Matt. 28:7–16; Mark 16:7). Later evidence (Eusebius, *HE* 1.7.14) does indicate the presence and missionary activity of Jewish Christians (*pace* Taylor 1993: 31–6, 45–6), particularly those led by descendants of Jesus’ brothers in what Bauckham (1990: 70) refers to as a ‘dynastic tradition’ within early Jewish Christianity.
- 9 These texts may be found in Elliott (1993), and in the more popular volume edited by Ehrman (1998).
- 10 Text and translation of *Didache* and *Barnabas* in Lake (1912). These non-canonical texts are presented along with the New Testament writings in Ehrman (1998), which contains (arguably) all of the Christian texts from the first 100 years of Christian origins.
- 11 We should perhaps call them Christian Jews: they become Jewish Christians only later (post-70 CE) after their exclusion from Jewish religious life (cf. de Boer 1998; Martyn 1968; note 48, this chapter).
- 12 It is generally considered that these passages refer to the same occasion, though this is certainly open to debate.
- 13 See also Wehnert (1997: 213–38), and review by Bockmuehl (1999). The so-called Noachide commandments, applicable to all humanity (cf. Gen. 9:1–7; Alexander 1992: 23–4; further Bockmuehl 1995), are also often mentioned as Jewish precedent and basis for the Apostolic Decree.
- 14 See e.g. Hill (1992: 107–15), and Catchpole (1977), who argues that the Decree was not part of the conference agreement with Paul, but was later promulgated by James and brought by his emissaries to Antioch (see p. 140, this chapter, on Gal. 2:11–21). It is notable that Paul’s own record is that the Jerusalem leaders ‘added nothing to me’ (Gal. 2:6) and urged only that Paul ‘remember the poor’, which, Paul says, he was in any case eager to do (Gal. 2:10). His apparently ‘liberal’ stance in regard to the eating of food offered to idols (1 Cor. 8:1–11:1) also seems scarcely compatible with the demands of the Decree (cf. Horrell 1997). However, for other viewpoints, see e.g. Tomson (1990:

- 177–220), Bauckham (1995: 470–1) and, more generally on the Apostolic Decree, Wehnert (1997).
- 15 On the incident at Antioch, see Dunn (1990: 129–82), Esler (1987: 86–9; 1998: 117–40) and Sanders (1990).
- 16 Were the demands of the Decree adopted at Antioch? Catchpole (1977: 441) argues not, on the basis of the fact that the Jewish Christians, including Peter, subsequently withdrew from fellowship with Gentile Christians.
- 17 Cf. Esler (1987: 71–109; 1994: 52–69; 1998: 93–116), Dunn (1990: 129–82), Hill (1992: 126–42) and Sanders (1990). Eating with gentiles was not apparently something of which all Jews would necessarily have disapproved; there was considerable diversity of practice in this regard (see further, Tomson 1990: 221–58; Sanders 1990). Esler, on the other hand, argues for a prohibition on the intimate form of Jewish-gentile dining which would have characterized Eucharistic meals, where there was sharing of one loaf and one cup (1987: 73–86; 1998: 93–116).
- 18 Peter's change of practice under pressure at Antioch is one reason to doubt the reliability, or at least the chronological placing, of Acts 10:9–11:18: if Peter was so firmly convinced, this early, of the acceptability of gentiles *as gentiles* (and, it seems, of the negation of the distinction between clean and unclean types of food) then his vacillating behaviour at Antioch is scarcely comprehensible.
- 19 An important point here concerns the translation of *tous ek peritomês* in Gal. 2:12. Bauckham argues that the NRSV's 'circumcision faction' is incorrect and that the phrase simply means Jews (1995: 471, n. 169; cf. Eusebius *HE* 3.4.2). Whether the Jews in view were Christian or non-Christian Jews is also the subject of some debate; see Longenecker (1990: 73–5).
- 20 Bauckham (1995: 471–5) argues that there is no real evidence to support the view that some Jewish Christians continued to advocate circumcision for gentile converts after the Apostolic Decree. While he is certainly right that there is no evidence of the demand for circumcision being at issue in 2 Corinthians, the evidence of Gal. (5:2–12; 6:12–15), Phil. (3:2–4) and Justin (*Dial.* 47) suggests that some Jewish Christians did indeed continue to urge the practice of circumcision on gentile Christian converts (see p. 141 cf. also Carleton Paget 1999: 744 n.51).
- 21 See further Dunn (1991, 1992) and Barclay (1996: 381–95).
- 22 Hence some scholars have spoken in terms of a transition from 'formative' Judaism to 'normative' Judaism. See e.g. Neusner (1984a, 1984b) and pp. 147, 151–2, this chapter.
- 23 For a recent book on James see Bernheim (1997); now also, Bauckham (1999).
- 24 Horrell (1998: 105–7). On the various aspects of Jude discussed here see Horrell (1998).
- 25 Note also Matt. 23:23. In 5:17 the phrase 'do not think . . .' implies a polemic (anti-Pauline?) against the idea that Jesus has somehow abolished the law.
- 26 Carleton Paget (1999: 753, with n. 88, citing Matt. 12:1–14/Mark 2:23–3:6; Matt. 15:1–20/Mark 7:1–23; Matt. 19:3–9/Mark 10:2–3). See also Wilson (1995: 46–56).
- 27 I am also grateful to Dr Revel A. Coles of the Ashmolean Museum for supplying the photograph of these fragments.
- 28 See Neusner (1979: 21–3), Alexander (1992: 3 *passim*) and Jagersma (1985: 149–52). Note, however, Wilson's caution about the pace and extent of the spread of rabbinic influence (1995: 46–7); see further Hezser (1997), who argues that the rabbinic movement in Roman Palestine was an informal, non-institutionalized, non-centralized movement based on networks of personal alliances. Her major work deserves closer attention than has been possible here.
- 29 Cf. Alexander (1992: 3): 'In the power-vacuum created by the First Revolt the Rabbinic

party and the Christians competed for the hearts and minds of Jewry. The rabbis emerged victorious.'

- 30 On the various aspects of 1 and 2 Peter discussed here, see further Horrell (1998).
- 31 For a comparison of Hebrews and Barnabas with regard to the issue of supersessionism, see Wilson (1995: 110–42).
- 32 Dates into the early second century have also been suggested, as has a Syro-Palestinian setting. See discussion in Carleton Paget (1994: 9–42) and Hvalvik (1996: 17–42).
- 33 See discussion in Horbury (1998: 8–11, 67–110), van der Horst (1994), de Boer (1998: 247–52) and Alexander (1992: 6–11).
- 34 A decision on this point depends in part on when the term *notzrim* (Nazarenes; i.e. Christians in general) was added to the benediction. See discussion in van der Horst (1994), Pritz (1988: 102–7) and de Boer (1998: 247–52).
- 35 Horbury (1998: 9–10) argues that curses may have been employed as a test of loyalty even before the 66–74 war in both Jewish and Christian worship (cf. Acts 26:11; 1 Cor 12:3; 16:33).
- 36 For a history of research into the Pseudoclementine corpus see Jones (1982; 1995: 1–38).
- 37 For further discussion see Stanton (1998), Lieu (1996: 103–53).
- 38 Cf. Epiphanius (*Pan.* 30.1.3–5; 30.2.1–6), Fossum (1985: 65–75; 1989: 309–10, n. 58; 330–1).
- 39 See Keck (1965, 1966), Wilson (1995: 149). Cf. also Gal. 2:10, though Rom. 15:29 seems to make clear that it is a certain section of the community in Jerusalem who are designated 'the poor' and thus to strengthen the argument that the reference here is essentially to those who are materially poor.
- 40 See further Wilson (1995: 148), Carleton Paget (1999: 757).
- 41 The title is due to the author's intention to provide an antidote to those who have been bitten by the serpent of heresy and to protect those who have not. The work is also cited as *Haereses*, 'heresies'.
- 42 See further Wilson (1995: 149–52), and Lüdemann (1989: 129–39), who argues strongly that the sect is indeed Jewish-Christian, with anti-Pauline tendencies.
- 43 It is questionable whether their existence can be traced back as far as Goulder (1994b) suggests.
- 44 I am grateful to Richard Bauckham for this point.
- 45 The gospel known by modern scholars as 'according to the Hebrews' apparently existed in Greek and was used by Jewish Christians in Egypt; see Elliott (1993: 3–6, 9–10). However, the allocation of patristic citations (all of which refer to 'the Hebrew Gospel', or some similar title) to three different gospels known by scholars as the Gospel of the Ebionites, of the Nazarenes, and according to the Hebrews, is not entirely secure; cf. the discussion in Pritz (1988: 83–94).
- 46 This is how the name given to this grouping is conventionally anglicized (e.g. Wilson 1995: 155–9; Pritz 1988). It normally appears in Greek as *Nazôraioi* (e.g. Acts 24:5; Epiphanius *Pan.* 29.1.1) and hence de Boer (1998; see 253, n. 1) prefers 'Nazoreans'; Amidon (1990: 90, etc.) renders it 'Nazoraeans'. The most extensive discussions are Pritz (1988) and Mimouni (1998a).
- 47 Matt. 2:23; 26:71, Luke 18:37, John 18:5, 7; 19:19, Acts 2:22; 3:6; 4:10; 6:14; 22:8; 26:9; see Pritz (1988: 11, n. 1); further, Mimouni (1998a: 216–22).
- 48 In an extensive recent etymological study, Mimouni (1998a) argues that for the period up to the early second century the term 'Nazarenes' (rather than the term 'Christian') may serve to designate the disciples of Jesus of Jewish origin. From the second century, however, with the formation of Jewish-Christian groups known as the Ebionites and the Elchaisites, the label Nazarenes should be reserved for the group(s) which the church

Fathers regard as orthodox (see esp. pp. 261–2). Pritz (1988: 15) argues in a similar vein that ‘the name Nazarenes was at first applied to *all* Jewish followers of Jesus . . . So also in Acts 24:5 the reference is not to a sect of Christianity but rather to the entire primitive Church as a sect of Judaism.’ De Boer (1998) proposes that the change may be understood in the following way: the Nazoreans [sic] were originally ‘Christian Jews’, one of a number of parties within pre-70 Judaism, who later became ‘Jewish Christians’, i.e. excluded from Jewish religious and institutional life as defined in post-70 rabbinic Judaism. Later still they were excluded from Christianity too.

49 See discussion above, with notes 33–5.

50 An early ground-breaking study by Robin Scroggs, together with critical assessment and further reading on the subject, may be found in Horrell (1999: 69–91). Also see Esler (1987: 47–80), in relation to Luke-Acts, and (1994: 70–91), in relation to John and the Community Rule at Qumran.

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PAUL AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF GENTILE CHRISTIANITY

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Todd Klutz

At the beginning of the second century Ignatius, bishop of the church of Antioch, was travelling through Asia Minor (modern Turkey) to Rome, where his zeal to die for the sake of Christ was soon to be satisfied. Prior to his arrival in the Capitol, however, he composed several letters, seven of which survive (see Chapter 20), and one of which – his *Epistle to the Magnesians* – preserves a fascinating and surprisingly complex image of the relations that obtained at this time between Christians and Jews.

After stressing that his Christian audience should be united in obedience to their bishop and elders (*Magn.* 3.1–7.2), Ignatius shifts to a different but related issue that sheds light on why he considered the authority of the church’s official leader-



Figure 7.1 Major places and cities associated with the spread of the Christ-movement among gentiles in the first century CE.

ship to be of such importance in this context; namely, he was aware of the existence of certain Christians who were so attracted to Jewish customs that they were conducting themselves not according to 'the new leaven' of Jesus Christ, but rather according to the 'bad leaven' of Judaism, which in Ignatius' view had 'grown stale and sour' (*Magn.* 8.1–10.3). As Ignatius furthermore had reason to believe that his judgement on this matter was shared by the Magnesians' bishop, his special emphasis on the church's obligation to obey the latter (*Magn.* 2.1–3.2) appears to have functioned, at least in part, as an indirect strategy to discourage Christian adoption of Jewish practices.

In order to achieve this aim Ignatius not only enjoins the Magnesians to submit to the bishop, but also explicitly evaluates Christian adoption of Jewish practices in a negative manner: 'It is absurd', he declares, 'to talk of Jesus Christ and to practise Judaism.' Immediately thereafter he attempts to defend this stance by means of an abstract theological ideology of the historical relationship between Judaism and Christianity: 'For Christianity did not believe in Judaism,' he reasons, 'but Judaism in Christianity, in which every tongue that has believed in God has been gathered together' (*Magn.* 10.3; my trans.). While many features of this passage invite comment, a couple of observations on it are particularly relevant to the discussion below. First of all, the passage's vocabulary, and in particular the distinction it presupposes between 'Judaism' and 'Christianity', encodes a larger cultural system of assumptions and values in which Christianity is no longer conceptualized (as it is e.g. in Acts 18:12–15 and 25:19) as a phenomenon *within* Judaism, but rather *outside* and very different from it. It would be no small mistake to take Ignatius' assumption on this matter as representative of all Christian opinion during his time; but it would be equally misguided to view his attitude as idiosyncratic, for his authority as bishop of one of the Christian movement's earliest and most influential centres of missionary endeavour undoubtedly enabled him to shape the perspectives of many of his Christian contemporaries.

Second, and on the other hand, because Ignatius' concern with Christians practising Judaism constitutes one of the most prominent themes in the letter, he must have thought that his evaluation of this practice was not shared by all of his Christian contemporaries. In fact, if his treatment of this matter had any relevance at all to the believers of Magnesia, at least some of them must have been familiar with the phenomenon that Ignatius' letter so adamantly opposes, even if they themselves had not been attracted to Judaism's ancient charms (cf. *Magn.* 11.1–2). In other words, and as is amply attested in a variety of other ancient sources, neither in public perception nor in religious practice were 'Christianity' and 'Judaism' universally distinguished from one another at the beginning of the second century CE, notwithstanding the rhetorical aims of the bishop of Antioch.

Nevertheless, for a figure such as Ignatius merely to presuppose the kinds of theological distinctions noted above, significant steps must already have been trodden down that dendriform path whereby the imprecisely labelled entity 'Christianity' became increasingly perceived and experienced as distinct from what for centuries has been called, with arguably greater violence to the details, 'Judaism', for reasons discussed by David Horrell at the beginning of Chapter 6. These steps – the most important situations, rhetorical moments, and developments that led to

the ambiguities of consciousness and practice attested in Ignatius – are the focus of the inquiry below; and as I attempt to describe, interpret, and explain these developments, the discussion will necessarily focus on a different but closely related topic – namely the process whereby faith in a Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, as God’s agent of salvation became an increasingly non-Jewish phenomenon. Indeed, as noted recently by Terence Donaldson, who has appropriately labelled this same process the ‘Gentilisation’ of early Christianity, to explore how one sect among many within first-century Judaism evolved into a distinct gentile religion is simultaneously to study that same sect’s penetration of the gentile world (Donaldson 1997: ix).

THE FIRST MISSION TO GENTILES

Just as inquiry into the separation of Christianity from Judaism demands investigation into the same movement’s missionary thrust into the social world of ancient Mediterranean gentiles, so study of the gentile mission necessarily involves discussion of the enigmatic Jewish intellectual, Saul of Tarsus (Figure 7.2). Known chiefly by his Roman name, Paul, to subsequent generations of Christians, Saul formulated opinions which, several decades later, were to exert a powerful influence on the



Figure 7.2 Painting of Paul, late fourth or early fifth century CE, from the Catacomb of Marcellinus and Peter. From Wilpert (1903: plate 254).

theology of Ignatius (Koester 1982: 281–4). Indeed, because the ideas found in Paul's letters have been so influential in the history of Christianity that he might properly be regarded the strong poet of early Christian theology, he continues to seduce many exegetes and historians into treating him in a fashion reminiscent of the now widely discredited great-man theory of history, according to which the landscape of the past is heavily coloured by the thoughts and deeds of a few extraordinary individuals (Carr 1987: 53–5).

Against this style of historiography, however, and despite Paul's undeniable influence on the beliefs and practices of subsequent generations of Christians, his theology and missionary praxis were no more immune to the conditions of his cultural environment than were those of his less famous predecessors, successors, and rivals. In this same connection, we would do well to remember that Paul was not the first Jewish believer in Jesus to proclaim the gospel of Christ to non-Jews; indeed, both in missionary outlook and theological reflection, Paul was almost certainly moulded in no small measure by a group of Greek-speaking Jewish 'Christ-followers' ('Christians' is anachronistic at this early stage) who, collectively, were in fact the first to include gentiles as equal members in their redemptive communities. On the basis of a story found in Acts 6:1–6, this group is often referred to as the 'Hellenists'. But more important, in order to contextualize Paul in relation to the web of historical contingencies that helped to make him what he was, we must give attention to what can be known about this group, to some of the challenging problems they pose for the historian, and to the relevance of recent scholarship and methodological developments to a critical understanding of them.

The Hellenists

Foundational to almost every question regarding the Hellenists are debates over the meaning and usefulness of the term 'Hellenists' itself, whose occurrence in Acts 6:1 deserves special attention. In general, most twentieth-century interpreters of this text have tended to view it as part of a distinct section of tradition (Acts 6:1–8:4) preserving at least partially reliable traditions about a distinct group of Greek-speaking Jewish (and possibly gentile – Esler 1987: 148–61) Christ-followers, some of whom, in response to intense conflicts with the Aramaic-speaking (and supposedly more traditional) apostles in the church of Jerusalem, departed from Judaea and initiated a movement that offered salvation through faith in Jesus to gentiles, without requiring them to observe the ritual laws of Judaism (Conzelmann 1973: 58–9). According to this view, then, these Jewish 'Hellenist' Christ-followers undertook a law-free mission to the gentiles within a year or so of the crucifixion of Jesus (c. 33 CE), and thus prior to Paul's conversion; but just as important, since the same perspective understands the Hellenists to have been both the primary target of Paul's pre-conversion activities as a persecutor and, through the efforts of their own distinctive community in Damascus, the main agents of his post-conversion resocialization into the ethnically mixed subculture of Jesus' worshippers, it also sees them as a major influence on the conceptual reconfiguration that attended Paul's conversion and developed into the ideology of universal mission expressed in his letters (cf. Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 10:32; Gal. 3:27–9).

In recent years, however, a small but growing contingent of scholars has arisen which judges these conclusions to be inadequately nuanced and the methods used to reach them as misleading. More specifically, due in some instances to doubts about the capacity of biblical criticism to uncover early and reliable traditions in the narratives that mention the Hellenists, but in others to scepticism about the referential value of the Acts narrative as a whole, several recent publications in New Testament studies have chosen simply to avoid the term 'Hellenists' altogether, either replacing it with interesting phrases such as 'the Christ cult' to refer to a slightly different but comparable phenomenon (e.g. Mack 1995: 75–96), or urging that what really needs to be revised is the suspiciously tidy denotatum of 'liberal' or 'radical' Jewish Christians that scholars customarily associate with the usual vocabulary (Hill 1992: 193–6); from this latter perspective, moreover, which Craig Hill has developed in his *Hellenists and Hebrews: Reappraising Division within the Earliest Church*, considerable progress can be made if we simply modify our weary image of the Hellenists as uniformly liberal and culturally open to include a more variegated range of social types and values.

Some of Hill's most important conclusions rely heavily on an earlier monograph (1978) written by Earl Richard concerning the main narrative in which the Hellenists are treated; namely, Acts 6:1–8:4. On the basis of painstaking literary analysis of this section and the material surrounding it, Richard's study demonstrates that the types of linguistic features which permeate the speech attributed in Acts 7:2b–53 to the Hellenist Stephen are the same as those that dominate the surrounding narratives in 6:1–7; 6:8–7:2a and 7:54–8:4 (Richard 1978: 229–42). By thus undermining the widespread assumption that this section of Acts can be confidently divided on stylistic grounds into pre-Lucan units of earlier tradition on the one hand and Luke's own narrative additions and theological rhetoric on the other, Richard's study has drawn attention to the methodological limitations of traditional varieties of biblical criticism to produce sure insights into the identity and character of the Hellenists.

However, by using Richard's conclusions to argue that Acts 6:1–8:4 yields virtually no reliable knowledge about Stephen or the Hellenists as a whole (Hill 1992: 101), Hill appears to have quit the enterprise of historical reconstruction too quickly. First of all, he fails to observe that although a high degree of literary and stylistic cohesion does indeed unite the narrative framework of this section and the speech material embedded in it, the Lucan characterization of the Hellenists as a group, and of Stephen and Philip as exemplary Hellenists in particular, significantly deviates in ideational substance from some of the most prominent themes of Luke-Acts, about which more will be said below. And second, while Hill is correct to highlight the limitations of biblical source criticism, he surprisingly shows no theoretical interest in any of the historicist varieties of contemporary literary criticism which, had he utilized any of them, could have substantially enriched his own historical inquiry. One critical resource capable of producing refinements at both of these points is the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's sociological poetics, amply illustrated in his renowned *The Dialogic Imagination*.

From the standpoint of the Bakhtinian concept of 'dialogism', which in general would see Acts 6:1–8:4 as a particular instantiation of struggles between socio-

cultural energies that promote heterogeneity and those that foster unity (cf. Bakhtin 1981: xviii), the formal coherence and literary cohesion that effectively resist source-critical efforts to identify pre-Lucan (and thus perhaps ideologically innocent or 'reliable') traditions in this section can properly be seen as an example of the Graeco-Roman political assumption that any human institution perceived to be disunited will suffer dishonour and loss of status (Welborn 1997: 1–8). The importance of honour in the group-oriented cultures of the first-century Mediterranean world is discussed in Chapter 1 of this volume. In other words, the aesthetic phenomenon of literary unity in this section of Acts, as in Luke-Acts as a whole, represents a rhetorical attempt to depict the earliest Christians as socially unified, even though features like the embarrassing split in Acts 6:1 remind us of its constructed nature. The ancient cultural and political assumptions that motivate this strategy, moreover, as well as the conformity to it foregrounded in Luke-Acts, constitute a culturally specific realization of Bakhtin's concept of the universal will to unity and holism.

At the same time, though, and from the same dialogic perspective, whatever theoretical shortcomings may have weakened the attempt of biblical criticism to uncover pre-Lucan traditions about the Hellenists, critics such as Martin Hengel and Étienne Trocmé have by no means been obtuse in thinking that alongside Luke's centripetal fiction of Christian harmony and unity are hints of an antithetical force – a sense of centrifugality and conflict – in his depiction of the Hellenists (Trocmé 1997: 21–2). Only what these interpreters were sensing was not, as they themselves believed, evidence of a pre-Lucan literary source; rather, it was evidence that a thoroughly Hellenized group of Greek-speaking Jewish Christ-followers (knowledge of whom, it is routinely overlooked, the implied reader of Acts 6:1 is assumed to possess) had made such a strong impression on the original participants in the discourse that a complete homogenization of their ideological distinctives was considered by the author to be rhetorically inexpedient, even in a work devoted to foregrounding Christian unity. Acts 6:1–8:4, therefore, is not so much a diachronic stratigraphy of primitive Christian theological development as a synchronic record of ideological heteroglossia and social conflict prevalent in the immediate situation of the narrative's author.

On the foundation of this dialogic reading of the Acts narratives, we might wish to press our inquiry further by asking what else can be responsibly conjectured about the Hellenists, or at least about how they may have been perceived and evaluated in their own social environment by persons other than the author of Acts. To begin, in view of Luke's conspicuous need to portray the earliest believers (and especially their leaders) as members of a unified and harmonious movement within Judaism (cf. Acts 11:1–18; 15:1–35), any images in his narratives that even feebly suggest otherwise can be evaluated as signs of a diversity which, though Luke was able to downplay or partially tame it, was too powerful, diffuse, and familiar to be omitted entirely from his account. For instance, just as Luke clearly backgrounds the conflict which rhetorical credibility requires him to acknowledge in Acts 15:1–35 (cf. Gal. 2:1–10), so in his terse acknowledgement of the Hellenists' complaint against the Hebrews (Acts 6:1–6) he is undoubtedly downplaying still another momentous conflict which, though a detached account of its agonistic fireworks would have contravened

his larger rhetorical goals, the effective mechanisms of gossip networks compelled him to admit. It is worth noting that Hill has been criticized by Esler for skating over the conflict apparent in Acts 6:1, a verse which, since F. C. Baur began this debate in the 1830s, has been the most significant item of data in the approach Hill attacks (Esler 1995). More specifically, since Luke's heavy emphasis on intra-Christian solidarity is scarcely served by his inclusion of such a complaint, the most fruitful questions we can bring to this text do not involve whether some kind of dispute like this actually occurred (undoubtedly it did) but rather why the occasion of the actual complaint – the Hellenists' widows had been neglected by the Hebrews in the distribution of poverty relief – had arisen in the first place.

As for why the widows among the Hellenists had been neglected, the narrator of Acts 6:1–6 tells us almost nothing. While his brevity could of course have been due to lack of information, it just as easily could have been due to an entirely understandable desire to background as many of this conflict's shameful features as possible. A cluster of clues supporting the latter option is found in the terminology used to denote the disputants, that is 'the Hellenists' and 'the Hebrews'. As implied above but widely overlooked, the occurrence of the Greek article ('the') with the noun 'Hellenists' conveys what grammarians call a 'well-known' nuance, implying that the construction as a whole denotes an entity with which the implied reader/hearer is assumed to be familiar; this interpretation is reinforced by the absence of any explanatory aside which, had it been present, would have suggested among other things that the audience was unfamiliar with this group. The noun for 'Hellenists,' moreover, is widely agreed to indicate the linguistic habits (i.e., Greek) of those so denoted, though debate continues concerning whether the implied language habits also entail distinct modes of thought and culture (Barrett 1994: 308). This latter question, however, is of no small importance, since the way it is resolved bears vitally on the present question.

Once this point in the inquiry is reached, what historical scholarship normally does is either highlight the undeniable prominence of language in cultural systems in general, the conclusion therefore being that the Hebrews and Hellenists differed significantly both in linguistic practice and in cultural and theological tendency, or stress the cultural heterogeneity that can be found within every distinct language grouping, the point being that the wild diversity within each distinct system (whether linguistically or culturally defined) stoutly defies valid generalization. And, on different levels of abstraction, both schools are correct; but unfortunately they both miss the point. For both types of observations ignore what surely needs to be recognized as a fundamentally important distinction in discussions of this matter; namely, that between an *etic*, observer-oriented historiography and an *emic*, participant-oriented ethnography. As the former mode of analysis can scarcely contribute more than it already has to this discussion, a highly conscious experimentation with the latter may well prove worth while.

In brief, as soon as we ask the very *emic* question of how two linguistically distinct groups, one of which preferred to speak Aramaic and the other probably being limited to Greek, would have viewed one another in the tense atmosphere of Jerusalem around 33–4 CE, some useful answers move into the reach of a reconstructive imagination. Most significantly, in view of the tendency of people in

the ancient Mediterranean world to stereotype each other on the basis of group affiliation (Malina 1993: 69–70; Esler 1998: 55–7), it seems very likely that a group of Aramaic-speakers in this context would have been powerfully predisposed to formulate negative generalizations about another group that spoke only Greek, despite the vast amount of cultural tradition the two may have shared, regardless of the now widely acknowledged Hellenization of all Palestine, and notwithstanding the unconscious internalization of Hellenistic ideas and values by the ‘Hebrews’ themselves.¹ In other words, the conflict whose ongoing and widely rumoured effects compelled Luke to acknowledge in Acts 6:1 what he surely would have omitted if he could, illustrates a widely attested social-scientific maxim: what may seem to an out-group observer to be a minor difference between people who are deeply alike, can often be perceived by the in-group participants as a tremendously important disagreement, which can lead the disputants into heated arguments, hard feelings, and division into factions that ultimately define themselves chiefly in terms of their mutual antagonism (Pruitt and Rubin 1986: 7–8).

The dispute regarding the widows, then, was probably only a minor symptom of a far deeper ailment that had been worsening for some time. For instance if, as seems virtually certain, the Hellenists consisted chiefly of Jews from the Diaspora who had accepted the apostles’ preaching at or around the Feast of Pentecost (Martin 1992: 135–6), they can easily be imagined to have fallen quickly into conflict with the apostles over any of a number of issues: having probably belonged to that stratum of Jews who had assimilated to the dominant gentile culture of the relatively populous cities of the Greek East in order to enhance their status and economic prospects, the Hellenists may well have found it difficult to grant the honour and authority claims made by the relatively agrarian, traditional, ‘Hebrew’ apostles who had introduced them to Jesus. Another possible underlying cause for the dispute mentioned in Acts 6:1, suggested by Esler (1987: 159–61), is the inclusion of gentiles at a very early stage into Hellenist circles and the tensions this could have caused with the ‘Hebrews’ in the very area of meals and table-fellowship mentioned in the text. In view of these differences in culture and socio-economic background, the dispute over the widows must have been only one of a number of intra-group squabbles experienced by this polymorphic community.

Consequently, whatever compliments Luke might deserve for his preservation of this snippet of primitive Christian heteroglossia, his account of the resolution of this conflict should be interpreted as exemplifying the same ideological tendency displayed so clearly in his subsequent narratives about Paul (Acts 21:17–26). To be more precise, his depiction of the outcome of the tension as an amicable arrangement, with seven of the Hellenists being selected to minister under the apostles to the previously neglected widows (Acts 6:2–6), is best understood as a rhetorically positive redescription of an ending that in reality had damaged the new movement’s already vulnerable reputation. And, in the ensuing narratives, his emphatic portrayal of the more violent hostilities towards the Hellenists as originating not from within the Jerusalem church, but rather from a coalition of unbelieving Jewish outsiders (Acts 6:11–14), is probably intended at least partly to divert attention away from the same internal schism and its damaging resolution.

The content of the accusations levelled by the Jewish outsiders against the

Hellenist Stephen (Acts 6:11–14), moreover, offers further insight into this same conflict and its implications. In brief the accusations, which the narrator of Acts not surprisingly attributes to ‘false witnesses’ (6:13), are that Stephen had been speaking profusely against both the Jerusalem temple and the law of Moses. While Luke cannot be expected to have preserved the original charge precisely as it had been given, he is most unlikely to have invented this sort of accusation, not only because the manufacture of fictitious criticism would have been rhetorically counterproductive but also because the accusations have no counterpart, or macro-structural parallel, in the Lucan stories about Peter and the other apostles. In fact, since the only parallels to this charge within Acts are criticisms levelled against Paul (Acts 21:27–8; 18:13; 25:8), and since Luke’s conspicuous effort throughout much of Acts to counteract antagonism to Paul is not helped in the least by a parallel of this kind with Stephen (unlike one with Peter or Jesus), the accusations summarized in 6:13 are almost certainly indicative of real charges brought against Stephen and his Hellenist associates. But most important, although the speech presented in Acts 7 as Stephen’s response to these criticisms shows every sign of being Luke’s own composition, it also displays the same sort of ideological polyphony discussed above in connection with the dispute over poverty relief: most notably, while Luke scarcely conceals his desire to portray Stephen as innocent of the charges brought against him (Acts 6:13), admittedly by ‘defences as to law and jurisdiction’ rather than by factual rebuttal (Esler 1987: 122–5), he almost simultaneously cites Stephen as uttering ideas that actually confirm the outsiders’ criticisms (7:44–50).

In addition, Stephen’s criticism of the temple would undoubtedly have been understood by his opponents as entailing antagonism to a larger set of attitudes held by the pious regarding purity, which of course played a vital role in maintaining Jewish identity *vis-à-vis* gentile culture (Harrington 1993: 36–7). Thus, when Luke subsequently portrays the Hellenists as preaching not only to Jews but also to gentiles (Acts 11:19–21), he stands clearly within the boundaries of cultural and historical plausibility. To say this, of course, is not to say that this section of Acts is entirely accurate on details or matters of sequencing: both the substantial amount of attention devoted to Peter’s evangelization of the gentile Cornelius (Acts 10:1–11:18), for instance, and the positioning of this story just ahead of Luke’s first and only reference to a large-scale outreach to gentiles by the Hellenists (Acts 11:19–26), have less to do with the order and proportion of historical events than with Luke’s need to associate the controversial inclusion of the gentiles with the accepted authority of Peter, rather than with the questionable status of the Hellenists. For even if the story about Peter and Cornelius contains reliable tradition about the founding of a church in Caesarea that included gentiles, the prominent role played by the Hellenists in the geographical and ethnic extension of the new message could only have exacerbated the reputation problems which already confronted the church in the eyes of many of its Jewish neighbours. In addition, in contrast to Acts 11:19–20, where the Hellenists’ preaching to gentiles in Antioch is described realistically enough (leaving aside the possibility that they took in gentiles earlier, in Jerusalem) as a virtually unanticipated, almost accidental consequence of their dispersion and where Luke asserts the word *Christianos* was first ascribed to the disciples (Acts 11:26),² their inclusion of the uncircumcised as full members of their own com-

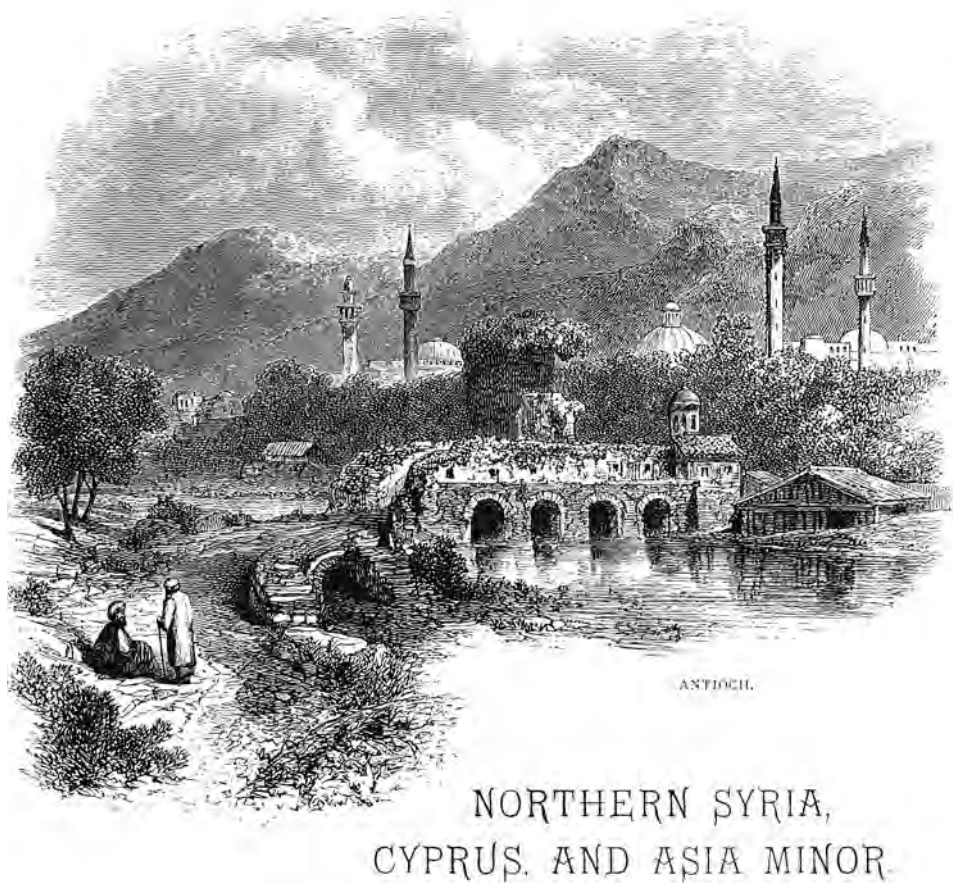


Figure 7.3 Nineteenth-century drawing of Syrian Antioch-on-the-Orontes, where *Christianos* was possibly first applied to a follower of Christ (Acts 11:26.) From Manning and Green (1879: 89).

munities could just as easily have been a deliberate attempt to fashion themselves partly in opposition to the 'Hebrew' apostles and the Jerusalem church, which the Hellenists understandably could have seen as implicated in the violence and dislocation they had experienced earlier (Acts 7:54–8:3).

Therefore, Luke's emphatic attempt to associate the first mission to the gentiles not only with the Hebrew part of the Christ-movement but also with the recognized authority of Peter and the full approval of Heaven (Acts 10:1–11:18) was a response to earlier stories that acknowledged the controversial connection between the gentile mission and the dispersion of the Hellenists. The outreach conducted by the Hellenists, moreover, can be usefully redescribed – in terms borrowed from the social psychology of interpersonal conflict – as a phase of 'escalation' in the same multi-phase game of challenge and response which, at an earlier stage, had expressed

itself in less weighty disputes such as the distribution issue: the conflict over aid having undoubtedly not been resolved as ideally as Acts 6:2–6 suggests, the residual inequities would have been interpreted by the Hellenists as an affront to their honour; they therefore would have been likely to increase the number and importance of the issues in the dispute (e.g., from the distribution of aid, to the sanctity of the temple and rules for admission into the group); and from there the deterioration of the relationship between the two parties could easily have led to violence (Acts 7:58–8:3), involvement of people originally outside the conflict (Acts 6:9–15; 8:4–40; 11:20–2), and separation (Acts 8:1b).³

One singularly important consequence of this conflict is that, if not prior to the separation phase (although that is possible), then certainly afterwards it facilitated a missionary campaign by the Hellenists that resulted in the conversion of a number of uncircumcised gentiles, and thus in the establishment of several communities outside Judaea that included both Jews and uncircumcised gentiles among its members. By relaxing the demands of Jewish ritual observance and fully incorporating gentiles without requiring them to become Jews, these communities would have been an offence to the ethnic sensibilities of any pious, Torah-observant Jew. One Jew, in fact, was so offended by the existence of these groups that he zealously devoted himself to stirring up as much trouble for them as he could.

PAUL: PERSECUTOR, CONVERT AND MISSIONARY

According to the author of Acts, Saul the Pharisee was present in Jerusalem to play a supporting role in the stoning of the Hellenist Stephen (Acts 7:58–8:1). While some interpreters have judged Luke unreliable on this point since Paul himself seems to imply that even after his conversion he was unknown to the churches of Judaea (Gal. 1:22; so Knox 1989: 21–3; cf. Hill 1992: 29, n. 41), this judgement is based on a misunderstanding of the force of the periphrastic imperfect in Gal. 1:22 (Esler 1998: 250, n. 9) and ignores the tacit correspondence between the account in Acts and Gal. 1:23, where Paul implies that these same churches of Judaea did in fact know him as a result of his pre-conversion opposition to them. It therefore seems likely that the zeal which led Paul the Pharisee about 135 miles north-west to Damascus, which was now home to a church that would help transform the persecutor into a proponent, had already been expressed earlier in Jerusalem through actions that had contributed to the dispersion of the Hellenists from Jerusalem and thus, ironically, to the establishment of those ethnically mixed churches Paul was now hoping to intimidate.

Like the antagonism of other Jewish opponents depicted in Acts 6:8–8:3, the persecuting zeal of Paul in particular (cf. Gal. 1:13; Phil 3:6) was apparently directed not against Jesus' whole community of followers – both 'Hebrews' and 'Hellenists' – but rather solely, or at least primarily, against the Hellenist faction (cf. 7:58–8:1). Paul's bias in this matter, moreover, is no insignificant detail, for a consideration of its implications leads directly to two important conjectures regarding the Hellenists and the nature of their influence on Paul. First of all, by entailing that Paul himself had distinguished between the Hebrews and the Hellenists, this

same observation strongly reinforces the position defended above regarding divisions in the Jerusalem church; namely, however extensive the similarities between the Hebrews and the Hellenists may have been in reality, their differences were perceived to be highly important, not only by the two groups themselves but by contemporary outsiders as well. And second, since Paul's subsequent career as a Christian missionary and thinker was profoundly shaped by tensions between him and the church of Jerusalem (cf. Rom. 15:30–32; Gal. 2:1–14), the same church, in other words, which the Hellenists had been forced earlier to leave, the resultant similarity between these tensions on the one hand and the Hellenists' earlier conflict with the Hebrews on the other invites us to explore whether the two situations may have been causally interconnected; whether, to be more precise, the reservations of the Jerusalem church about Paul may have stemmed from conspicuous affinities between the missionary-theological practice of Paul and that which the apostles had encountered previously in the Hellenists.⁴

A couple of factors suggest that a causal nexus of this sort is historically feasible to imagine, however vague our reconstruction of it is destined to be. For one thing, in order to be able, as Paul evidently was, not only to distinguish between the Hebrews and Hellenists in the Jerusalem church but also to develop a singularly intense antagonism towards the latter, he must have acquired a considerable body of information about them and their apparently idiosyncratic views. And second the church in Damascus, which almost certainly was established by the Hellenists (cf. Acts 9:21), managed to escape becoming another victim of Paul's zealous intervention (cf. Acts 9:1–2); instead, and against Paul's original designs, it became the first church in which Paul actually participated as a worshipper of Jesus, the community that resocialized him in the values of the new movement (Acts 9:8–22; Gal. 1:17). At least some ideas and practices of a distinctly Hellenist flavour, therefore, must have been mediated to Paul through the church in Damascus.

However, in the interest of understanding both Paul's subsequent labours as a missionary for Christ and the relationship between this work and his writings, we must not pass over too quickly either his life as a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5) or his conversion. Regarding the former, if we are right in thinking that one of the qualities Paul found especially offensive in the Hellenists was that their inclusion of gentiles as equal members of the redemptive community was facilitated by an abandonment of the usual Jewish requirement of circumcision, then any information his letters might provide concerning this same matter – that is, his pre-conversion ideas about the relationship between Jewish mission to gentiles and the custom of circumcision – could help us towards an understanding of how the various phases and key moments of his life fit together into a meaningful whole. Fortunately, we happen to possess a uniquely valuable piece of such information in the fifth chapter of Paul's letter to the Galatians, where he insinuates that at some earlier point in his life he had actually *upheld* circumcision as a requirement for gentiles wishing to become full members of the covenant community (Gal. 5:11a).

Gal. 5:11a contains the following rhetorical question: 'If I am still preaching circumcision, brothers, why am I still being persecuted?' In this context Paul is best understood as responding to a claim made to his Galatian audience by his Judaizing Christian opponents. The opponents' claim appears to have been that while Paul

himself might not perform circumcision on his gentile initiates, he really does understand and advocate circumcision as an implicit and essential part of his gospel (Donaldson 1997: 282). Paul's question in Gal. 5:11a, therefore, read properly as a rebuttal of this assertion, should be taken to imply that although he did at one time advocate circumcision as a necessity for gentiles who wished to become full members of the people of God, he no longer espoused this view (so also Esler 1998: 74). Furthermore, in light of the pivotal significance that Paul attributes earlier in the same letter to his revelatory experience of conversion (Gal. 1:11–17), the change this same question implies to have taken place in Paul's conviction about circumcision is best understood as having coincided with his conversion and call to preach Christ to the nations. And finally, the more immediate communicative effect of this construction should not be overlooked; namely, as far as Paul was concerned, the 'persecution' he was currently suffering for the sake of his circumcision-free position served as proof that he no longer endorsed his opponents' position.

The rhetorical force of this passage in its Galatian context, however, is relevant to our present purposes only in so far as it enables us to recover Paul's pre-conversion attitudes regarding the interrelated issues of circumcision and gentiles. In brief, by enabling us to infer that Paul was strongly interested in the connection between these issues *before* his conversion to Christ, what this remarkable fragment of biography reveals is a powerful tension that must have contributed, if indeed it did not lead the way, to Paul's eventual conversion. More specifically, since on the one hand the advocacy of circumcision mentioned in Gal. 5:11a entails involvement in a number of culturally related activities, ranging from attracting potential converts among the gentiles and instructing them in Jewish tradition, to arranging the surgical operations that would complete their conversion, Paul's interest in the status of gentiles *vis-à-vis* the God of Israel and their proper initiation into the covenant community was clearly alive prior to his conversion/call. Similar interest, moreover, is not only well documented from the Judaism of Paul's time (Borgen 1996: 45–59, 68–9), but also is consistent with the universalistic belief shared by Paul and his kin that the God of Israel was the one true God of all creation, and thus of all humanity (Boyarin 1994: 39).

On the other hand, however, as the same text also implies a stark contrast between Paul's new proclamation of gentile inclusion without circumcision and his former advocacy of circumcision as an entrance requirement, it suggests that sitting very uneasily next to Paul's pre-conversion ideal of a single humanity united under the one true God of creation was a competing particularism that was zealous to preserve Jewish difference, to protect the cultural and racial distinctiveness of Judaism, and to perpetuate all the ancestral traditions and practices that served these ends (e.g., circumcision, dietary restrictions, and sabbath observance). While on the whole the distinctiveness of these customs probably served to attract gentile interest in Judaism as much as it did to repel it, the practice of circumcision in particular, the custom most relevant to the process of gentile conversion, was a quite different matter: it was ridiculed by many Greeks and Romans as a barbaric form of bodily mutilation (Murphy-O'Connor 1996: 229), and was also forbiddingly painful for any adult males who underwent the operation. In addition, although the non-exclusive character of Graeco-Roman paganism entailed that in most contexts a

considerable range of Jewish customs could be adopted by a gentile without loss of honour among his or her neighbours, to go so far as to get oneself circumcised was perceived, especially by those in the upper strata, as a shameful attachment to foreign rites (cf. Josephus, *JA* 20.38–40).

Circumcision therefore must have prevented more than a few God-fearers (that is, gentiles who sympathized with Judaism to one degree or another but had not yet permitted themselves to be circumcised) from becoming full converts; furthermore, in view of the social problems and related difficulties it could bring to the gentile who submitted to it, circumcision was probably far less popular among the upper strata of society than among those with considerably less to lose. In view of these kinds of considerations, Paul's apparent pre-conversion advocacy of circumcision as a condition for gentile conversion (Gal. 5:11a) can be realistically contextualized within an inner-Jewish conversation precisely about whether circumcision was always necessary in this connection. Not only would such a discussion give Paul's earlier views some much-needed relevance – why after all had he been preaching circumcision if its necessity for the assumed purpose (gentile conversion) had not been under challenge? – it also corresponds to a web of assumptions embedded in the first-century Jewish historian Josephus' story about the God-fearing (and eventually proselyte) King Izates of Adiabene, who is torn in different directions by two Jewish teachers with contrasting views concerning the merit of circumcision in his particular case (*JA* 20.38–46).

Contests of this latter sort, like the ideas and values that fuel them, constitute a large part of every culture; and just as any given culture and its constituent meanings and tensions are constituted by human processes of externalization, whereby ideas and the discussions of which they are a part are made visible or audible in the physical world, so these externalized ideas and debates become internalized; that is, mentally digested by the people who encounter them, and incorporated in one way or another into their existing cognitive frameworks. Borrowing this vocabulary from P. Berger and T. Luckmann's influential treatise *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966: 78–9), we may usefully describe Paul as a figure who, some time prior to his dramatic experience *en route* to Damascus, almost certainly had internalized contests and debates which, as a strict Pharisee in a world intoxicated by Hellenism, he would have been hard pressed to avoid. Consequently, when he first encountered the 'Hellenists' of the Jerusalem church – those Greek-speaking Jewish Christ-followers and presumably their gentile fellow-believers who, in addition to proclaiming that a man recently crucified by the Romans was the Messiah, were teaching gentiles that a baptismal rite of identification with this man, now claimed to have been resurrected as spiritual and universal, had replaced circumcision as the way of admission into the people of God – Paul would not have seen them as dramatically different from every other Jewish group he had previously encountered.

At least one feature of the Hellenists that Paul probably did consider novel, however, at least in its intensity, was the success they were able to enjoy, apparently due in part to their scandalous substitution of Christ for circumcision as a boundary marker for entering the community, at incorporating gentiles into their fellowship. To make matters still worse, almost all the gentiles the Hellenists were attracting had been associated, and in many cases probably were still associated, with Jewish

synagogues (cf. Acts 9:1–2). To someone like Paul, then, the views, practices, and mission of the Hellenists would have been a scandal on several fronts: first of all, the Hellenists' replacement of circumcision with faith in a cursed criminal executed by the Romans, as the fundamental requirement for entrance into the community, blatantly contradicted the stance to which Paul had already committed himself in the inner-Jewish debates assumed in Gal. 5:11a; second, by encouraging their gentile associates to view themselves not as outside or alien to Israel, but rather as equal participants with Jews in the covenant community, the Hellenists would have been seen by Paul as a serious threat to the boundaries, identity, and very existence of Judaism (cf. Dunn 1993: 70); and third, as Paul himself was keenly interested in seeing the honour of Israel's God recognized and increased by the gentiles, the success of the Hellenists' mission to non-Jews must have provoked in Paul intense pangs of envy, however misguided he may have considered their peculiar configuration of beliefs and practices to be.

Paul's jealousy of the Hellenists' missionary success also probably helped to lay the psychological foundations for his own conversion. Apart from the suspiciously energetic zeal with which he attacked this group just before his conversion, the evidence for this is limited to a single fascinating comment addressed explicitly to the gentiles in the audience of his Romans letter, written around twenty-two years after his experience on the road to Damascus. More specifically, when he states in this context that he seeks to make the success of his own gentile mission known among his Israelite kinfolk – 'in order', he says, 'to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them' (Rom. 11:13–14) – the connections that he assumes between successful ministry to gentiles, the potential jealousy of non-Christian Jews who hear of his missionary accomplishments among the nations, and the possibility that this jealousy might lead some of these Jews to the salvation now proclaimed by Paul, create a missiological formula that encapsulates what Paul could easily have deduced, in retrospect, from the circumstances of his own conversion. In brief, if, as a strict Pharisee with an interest in fulfilling Israel's witness to the nations, Paul had been provoked to jealousy by the success of the Hellenists' outreach to the gentiles, and thereby lured to Christ, then perhaps other observant Jews might be stimulated to jealousy by the success of his mission, and so unite themselves with the Christ of his gospel. Furthermore, as is commonly overlooked but discussed further below (p. 189), this same set of interconnected motifs in Rom. 11:13–14 is strengthened by Luke's frequently criticized portrayal of Paul as one who, though his call may have been to proclaim Christ among the gentiles, persistently preached his gospel to the Jew first (Acts 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:1–3, 10, 17; 18:1–11), even though this sometimes resulted in painful punishments from unsympathetic authorities in the synagogues (2 Cor. 11:24).⁵

To be sure, Paul's jealousy of the Hellenists was only one of several forces that had to coincide in order to effect his conversion. One other that merits special attention here, due to its significance for the subsequent development of Paul's theology, is the onset of an illness that befell him as he was *en route* to Damascus. The most explicit evidence for this illness is found, once again, in the Lucan account, though it possibly has some attestation in Paul's own letters. More specifically, in the first of Luke's three accounts of Paul's conversion (Acts 9:1–19a), the circumstances of

Paul's vision of the resurrected Jesus are described as including both an affliction – he is unable to see for three days (9:9) – and a subsequent healing (9:17–19), accomplished in Damascus (where Paul was laid up blind in a street called Straight – Acts 9:11, which still exists [Figure 7.4]) through the hands of the disciple Ananias. Both the onset of illness and the therapy, moreover, are loosely linked by the narrator of Acts to mundane processes of eating and drinking: the initial vision is followed immediately not only by blindness but also by abstinence from food for three days, during which additional visions are experienced (9:12), while the process of healing includes 'taking some food' (9:19), which is said to restore the patient's strength.

While the period of abstinence here is not presented by the narrator of Acts as having preceded Paul's initial vision and loss of sight but rather as having followed immediately afterwards, the prominence of fasting and eating in this context invites one to wonder whether the actual experience to which this narrative refers may have been conditioned by a prolonged period of abstinence from food. Several factors warrant such a suspicion. First of all, fasting is well attested in antique religious sources as one of the most widely used methods of inducing altered states of consciousness and ecstatic experiences of the spirit world (Luck 1985: 8, 11).⁶ Second, and



STRAIGHT STREET, DAMASCUS.

Figure 7.4 A nineteenth-century lithograph of the street called Straight, now known as Darb el-Mostakim, in Damascus. From Manning and Green (1879: 12).

relatedly, a wealth of psychiatric and related research on the effects of being deprived of physiologically basic provisions such as food and sleep indicates why this kind of self-deprivation is able to induce these states: namely, by destabilizing the physiological processes that enable human beings to interpret reality in the mundane but pragmatically reliable ways of everyday experience, it can often trigger alternative perceptions of reality that many healthcare specialists would label as hallucinatory or even psychotic (Walsh 1997: 110–14). And third, later in Luke's narrative, after Paul has become an effective witness to Christ among both Jews and gentiles, a group of more than forty zealous non-Christian Jews are described not only as harbouring the same kind of hostility to Paul that Paul himself had displayed earlier to the Hellenists, but also as having 'bound themselves by an oath *neither to eat nor drink* until they had killed Paul' (Acts 23:12, my italics; cf. verses 14, 21); perhaps Paul too, then, in his earlier zeal to destroy the Hellenists, had employed such techniques.

As this kind of strategic fasting for particular socio-religious objectives was well known in the Judaism of Paul's day and firmly established among Christians in the immediately ensuing centuries (Brown 1988: 218–24), the possibility that Paul had included this strategy among others in his attack against the Hellenists is certainly worthy of further exploration. For in addition to explaining both his illness and his attendant encounter with the heavenly Christ this sort of scenario corresponds to a pattern of interconnected experiences – some physiological, others mystical – which Paul claims in his own letters to have had. Most notably, in 2 Cor. 11:27 Paul explicitly includes sleeplessness and deprivation of food and drink among the routine experiences that distinguish his apostleship from that of his opponents; and, in the immediately ensuing chapter of the same document (in its canonical form), he establishes an overt link between his own ongoing struggles with an unspecified illness – 'a thorn . . . in the flesh, a messenger of Satan' (2 Cor. 12:7) he calls it – and mystical experiences which, though they cannot be unproblematically identified with the revelatory experience of his conversion, certainly seem to have had much in common with it (Segal 1990: 35–8). Writing to the churches of Galatia he speaks of some physical weakness, possibly connected with his eyes, which was the reason for his previously proclaiming the gospel there (Gal. 4:12–15).

Notwithstanding the conjectural character of any aetiology that might be assigned to Paul's affliction, one point seems virtually certain: like his subsequent 'visions and revelations' (2 Cor. 12:1), the experience that Paul himself viewed, at least in retrospect, as an essential part of his own call to proclaim Christ, occurred in connection with an illness. Just as important, though, the timing of this illness coincided with his trip to Damascus – a journey undertaken with the deliberate aim of persecuting a movement that was worshipping the spirit of a man recently crucified. One question therefore that ought to be asked (but seldom is in discussions of Paul's conversion) is how someone like Paul would have been inclined to understand an instance of affliction that happened to intersect strenuous participation in a socio-religious conflict.

As a Pharisee and, thus, as someone who believed in angels and spirits and demons, Paul would have been strongly predisposed to interpret this illness as the work either of God or of some lower, possibly demonic, spirit being; furthermore,

due to the aforementioned synchronism of the affliction and the conflict with the Hellenists – a phase during which, by Paul's own later admission, he 'was violently persecuting the church of God and trying to destroy it' (Gal. 1:13) – it is highly unlikely that he would have seen the two sets of phenomena as unrelated. In his eyes there probably were only two ways in which his affliction could be interpreted: either his current antagonists, the Hellenists, had employed some magico-religious ritual, like those abundantly attested in ancient cursing formulas (Gager 1992: 25–30, 175–98), to conjure up a malevolent spirit (perhaps that of their violently killed hero) against him, or, far more disturbing in the long term, the illness was in accordance with the good pleasure of the Almighty Himself, who therefore would be understood as intervening on behalf of the Hellenists, and against Paul.

If, as suggested above, Paul's persecution of the Hellenists was partly coloured by pangs of jealousy over the success of their mission to the gentiles, he may have needed very little time after his illness on the road to Damascus to interpret this experience as the intervention of his opponents' now resurrected and vindicated founder. Although his subsequent interactions with the church in Damascus undoubtedly contributed to the positive interpretation which he eventually assigned to this event, he may well have been predisposed to construe it in this dramatically self-redefining way quite *apart* from the Christian community's influence: as modern studies of conversion suggest, people tend not to convert to a 'new' pattern of religion unless they are unhappy in some way with their 'old' one (Stark 1996: 19). But however far Paul may have travelled down the psychological path to conversion before arriving at Damascus, his willingness to travel yet farther in this direction was undoubtedly increased by his experience in Damascus of appearing before his enemies in a state of physical weakness.

Furthermore, a combination of factors working in unison – Paul's pre-conversion awareness of the Hellenists' universalist proclivities, his interpretation of his illness as the work of his enemies' vindicated founder, and his shift of allegiance from Torah observance (and thus circumcision) to faith in Christ as the boundary marker for membership in the community of salvation – would all have encouraged him to conceptualize the agency that confronted him in his illness less as the historically particular Jewish male Jesus of Nazareth than as the universal spirit of the Hellenists' Christ (Boyarín 1994: 39). Indeed, this conception of Jesus' person became one of the most consequential axioms of Paul's whole missionary enterprise, theology, and legacy. For it not only played a key role in his efforts to promote a tangible social unity between Jewish and gentile believers in Jesus but also eventually contributed, in ways Paul neither could have foreseen nor would have approved, to both the gentilization of the churches and to the gradually widening split between Judaism and Christianity.

In Paul's own eyes, of course, the main functions of Jesus' universal lordship were to provide grounds for the inclusion of gentiles, as equal members together with Jews, in the people of God, and to create conditions whereby these Jewish and gentile members would be able to worship and fellowship together in unity, with no member having to surrender every trace of his or her ethnic particularity. While actualizing this ideal even on a limited scale was no easy task (and for reasons noted below, the gap between the Pauline ideal and the ecclesial realities grew wider and

wider in the generations that came directly after Paul) Paul's own letters generally agree with the narratives about him in Acts that he energetically worked to turn this vision into a social reality. In his letter to the churches of Galatia, for example, whose gentile members had recently been persuaded by Torah-observant Jewish Christians to believe that full conversion to Judaism (i.e. circumcision) was necessary for salvation (Gal. 1:6–9; 3:1–5), Paul argues that a proper understanding of his Torah-free gospel had already made table fellowship between Jewish and uncircumcised gentile believers not only possible but a fact of ecclesial praxis (2:11–14). This same gospel is furthermore inseparably linked in Paul's mind to the Spirit of Christ that had come to possess him at his conversion (1:15–16), which also had mystically united him with Christ so as to radically alter his self-understanding (2:19–20), and which the Galatians themselves had received when they accepted Paul's law-free gospel (3:2–5). Indeed, in the rhetorical situation addressed by this same remarkable letter, these experiences of the Spirit are employed by Paul to legitimate his interpretation of the Gospel, for at least in retrospect he saw each of these experiences as having been facilitated not by observance of Torah (i.e., the laws given to Israel through Moses) but rather by faith in Christ.

In contrast to the Galatians letter, however, whose distinctive situation inspired Paul to emphasize the obsolescence of the Torah with regard to salvation, his so-called First Letter to the Corinthians was powerfully shaped by a need to stress the law's abiding relevance to matters of morality and ethical conduct (Fee 1987: 17–18). Particularly prominent among these matters are various types of sexual sin, idolatry, and deviations from widely accepted norms of conduct expected of husbands and wives. Strikingly, in response to each of these problems Paul relies heavily on the Torah to provide at least part of the necessary corrective (1 Cor. 5:6–8, 13; 10:1–13; 11:7–10). By applying the Torah to the moral problems of the Corinthian church, Paul may seem to have allowed his response to be so deeply shaped by the contingencies of the church's situation that he has compromised the Christ–Torah antithesis which, as noted above, pervades his letter to the Galatians. However, if we wish to understand the larger conceptual scheme that is assumed and implied by Paul's letters, we must not allow suspicions of incoherence to submerge completely the hermeneutical continuities that cut across his different compositions; and here, three such continuities are particularly worth noting.

First, as in 1 Corinthians so in Galatians Paul does in fact commend the law, reinterpreted in light of the coming of Christ, as a moral bulwark against self-indulgence (Gal. 5:13–15).⁷ Second, in both letters Paul applies a broadly allegorical hermeneutic to the pertinent passages of Torah in order to arrive at the desired ethical maxim: examples of this tendency include the spiritualization of food and drink in 1 Cor. 10:1–5 and of Abraham's two wives in Gal. 4:21–31 (Boyarin 1994: 32–4). And third, just as Paul perceived the crisis in Galatia as analogous to previous threats to his ideal of tangible unity between Jews and gentiles in Christ (Gal. 2:11–14), so also he probably saw many of the problems in Corinth as obstacles to the same socio-religious goal; his instructions in 1 Cor. 16:1–4, for instance, regarding the monetary collection for the impoverished Jewish believers in the Jerusalem church, were certainly regarded by Paul himself, if not also by his predominantly gentile audience in Corinth, as an attempt to foster unity between Jewish and

gentile believers in Christ (Rom. 15:25–7; Gal. 2:9–10; cf. Witherington 1995: 314). To be sure, the tension between this latter aim and the difficulties addressed earlier in the letter is not asserted on the surface level of the text, but its reality and impact on Paul's response are tacitly signalled by the macro-structural parallelism that unfolds through his repeated use of the construction 'Now concerning' (Greek *peri de*), which, in addition to introducing the collection issue (16:1), serves to broach a variety of ethical problems (e.g. the cases of sexual immorality mentioned in 7:1 and idolatry in 8:1; cf. also 7:25 and 8:1) whose presence in the Corinthian community would have made the 'saints' of the Jerusalem church anxious about associating with such a group.

Further comparison of these same two letters, which I interpret as the theological and contextual boundaries within which Paul's other letters are best placed, discloses another contrast worthy of comment. In general terms, whereas the prominence of the circumcision issue in the implied situation of Galatians presupposes that the only people of consequence in this controversy are *males* (Stowers 1994: 73–4), the foregrounding of topics pertaining to gender and sexuality in 1 Corinthians (e.g., 1 Cor. 5:1–13; 6:12–20; 7:1–40; 11:2–16) presupposes a situation in which both men and women play important roles. Although the process by which the Corinthian community arrived at their beliefs and practices pertaining to gender and the body cannot be reconstructed in detail, in general it must have involved hermeneutical interplay between the instruction Paul had originally given the community face to face (2:1–5) and the assumptions which some of the Corinthians (in particular the so-called 'strong') already held about the body before their conversion. As this set of assumptions, moreover, appears not to have been particularly Jewish but rather, in Dale Martin's words, 'a more general upper-class Greco-Roman ideology' (Martin 1995: 207–8), which placed the body and sexual activity at the bottom of human values, the strong faction's use of Pauline teaching regarding the implications of baptism ('there is no male and female', Gal. 3:28) to promote sexual asceticism within marriage (1 Cor. 7:1–7), condone divorce (7:10–16), and devise patterns of worship that blurred distinctions between the sexes and deviated from the customs practised by contemporary churches (11:2–16) is scarcely surprising. (e.g., 1 Cor. 7:1–40; 11:2–16).

However, despite the role that Paul's own teaching may have played in the formation of this synthesis, Paul himself clearly saw these developments as posing a threat to the purity of the Corinthian community. Indeed, in view of the parallelism, just noted, between Paul's initial references to some of the church's problems on the one hand (1 Cor. 7:1, 25; 8:1) and his subsequent mention of the collection for the Jerusalem church on the other (16:1–4), as well as his appeal to 'the churches [note the plural] of God' as an example at the end of this same unit of discourse (11:16), Paul undoubtedly viewed the troubles noted above at least partly in terms of how they might damage the church's reputation among the other churches (including Jerusalem), how they might impact on his collection strategy, and how they might ultimately undermine the honour of his own ministry.

That the baptismal formula in Gal. 3:28 ('There is no Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus'), moreover, did in fact play a role in the gender troubles of the Corinthian

community is suggested by the well-known absence of the 'male and female' phrase from the version employed in 1 Cor. 12:13 (Horrell 1996: 169), where Paul explains, 'For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.' Since the Gal. 3:28 version with its emancipationist overtones is probably closer to what Paul normally taught his new converts, the increasingly recognized success of the Pauline churches at winning the allegiance of women in particular (MacDonald 1996: 78–9, 189–95) is scarcely surprising. As implied in both 1 Cor. 7:1–40 and 11:2–16, many female converts apparently interpreted their ecstatic experience of the Spirit at baptism as entailing the end of confinement to the kinds of private roles (e.g. submissive wife, caring mother) which Graeco-Roman codes of tradition had long assigned them. And, while it would certainly be anachronistic to equate either Paul's spiritual ideal or the ancient churches' imperfect realization of it with 'feminism', it would be equally misleading to suggest that women ultimately found their aspirations completely frustrated in Paul's communities: women married to non-Christian men, for instance, are encouraged by Paul not to rule out the unconventional possibility that, instead of simply adopting (as most wives did) the religion of their husbands, they might actually function as God's chosen means of bringing their husbands to salvation (1 Cor. 7:16); but perhaps even more striking, rather than sweepingly advise all unmarried women and widows in the church to embed themselves through marriage in the identity of some marriageable male, Paul actually commends his own preference, that is singleness and celibacy, to all that can endure it – not only male but also female – as long as they do not succumb to sexual passion or extramarital intercourse (1 Cor. 7:7, 25–6, 32–40). Finally, consonant with all these features are the prominent roles and statuses which Paul tacitly assigns to various female converts in the personal notes and greetings in the endings of Rom. 16:1–16 and Phil. 4:2–3.

Unlike Ignatius, with whom this study began, Paul is never able to assume, either in the letters cited above or in his other undisputed writings, that the particular configuration of beliefs and practices he promotes can be conceptualized as something outside of Judaism. One particularly noteworthy reason for this is that although Paul's converts included many gentiles of pagan background (1 Thess. 1:9; Gal. 4:8), the access he had as a Jew to social networks radiating round the synagogues of the Diaspora supplied him with another type of convert among the gentiles; namely of God-fearers (discussed on pp. 92–4), many of whom, due to the ambiguity of their status among their Jewish and proselyte associates, must have been psychologically ripe for the sort of message Paul proclaimed. In fact, in view of the role that social networks play in most conversions to new religious movements, the sorts of pagan (i.e. non-God-fearing) gentiles that would have been most likely to take an interest in Paul's gospel would have been those who possessed social connections to gentiles of the God-fearing sort, whose involvement in the life of the synagogue scarcely would have prevented them from maintaining a wide range of relationships with persons untouched by Judaism. As Abraham Malherbe has observed, Paul's normal pattern in each of his missionary locales was to begin in the synagogues, where, after winning an audience from the local God-fearers (and perhaps a few Jews), he would eventually encounter strong opposition (2 Cor. 11:24–5); then, once this opposition made fruitful participation in the synagogue no longer

possible, he would rely both on opportunities provided by his own workshop and on the households of whatever sympathizers he had found in the Jewish community to consolidate and expand the network of his potential followers (Malherbe 1983: 68–9). Thus, although the prominence of synagogues and God-fearers in the Acts account of Paul's missionary work (e.g. Acts 13:14–48; 16:13–15; 17:10–12) is something of an exaggeration, stemming in part from a rhetorical need to defend Paul against charges of apostasy (Acts 21:21), it nevertheless corresponds to a strategic aspect of Paul's missionary endeavours (Hopkins 1998: 214–15) and is repeatedly implied in his own letters. Moreover, the narrator of Acts explicitly confirms that the majority of his converts come from Jewish synagogues, an influential minority of these being Jews by birth, but most of them being Gentile god-fearers with various degrees of commitment to Judaism.

Despite this initial point of continuity with the synagogues, however, Paul's recipe for enabling the constituents of this mixed community to accept one another as equal members of the people of God contained seeds of dramatic change in the churches' ethnic and social composition. The recipe in question, it is worth recalling, maintains that since in Christ the physical practices of Judaism have no direct relation to the essential domains of the heart and the Spirit (Rom. 2:28–9), those who belong to Christ are free in these matters to follow their own conscience. One essential proviso to this is that such liberty must be subordinated in practice to loving concern for the welfare of others in the community, and especially those who are 'weak in faith' (i.e., those whose understanding of liberty had not yet progressed to Paul's level of insight). Certainly one of the most influential manifestos of cultural flexibility and tolerance ever formulated, this ethic of adaptability allowed Paul not only to follow Jewish custom when it suited his purposes but also to tolerate the continuation of Jewish practices by select Jewish (but not gentile) members of his churches (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19–23). On the other hand, though, the tacit relegation by the same principle of Jewish practices such as circumcision, dietary purity, and sabbath observance to the status of non-essential externals must have prevented virtually all but the most assimilated Jews from joining Paul's churches. For whatever being Jewish meant in the eyes of the kinds of Jews Paul encountered in the synagogues of the Diaspora, it certainly did not involve regarding these practices as merely peripheral; on the contrary, the cultural difference of being Jewish consisted at least in part of construing these markers as central to one's identity (Boyarin 1994: 9–10; Esler 1998).

Consequently, however useful this strategy of adaptability may have been to Paul in his own missionary contexts, it held little promise in the long term of attracting future generations of Jews into the churches he founded. And this tactical shortcoming should not surprise us; for Paul's expectation of Christ's imminent return, perhaps in his own lifetime (1 Cor. 7:29–31; 1 Thess. 4:13–5:11), virtually precluded the possibility of anything resembling a 'long term' perspective contributing to his missionary and ecclesiological plans (Donaldson 1997: 246). Accordingly, when his eschatological hopes of Christ's return failed to materialize, but his churches and disciples lived on, his own precedent of devaluing the key markers of Jewish identity was recontextualized and attributed meanings that Paul himself had never envisioned. With the aid of hindsight, it is tempting to say that what

happened to the church's constituency in these initial generations after Paul might easily have been predicted by some ancient ethnographer watching Paul's operations with the hypothetical detachment of a non-participant observer. Whether or not this be true, the predictable progress of the church's gentilization did in fact continue apace, and a few examples of how this development can be discerned in New Testament documents composed after the death of Paul need at least brief attention before this study can be brought to a proper conclusion.

ETHNICITY AND GENDER AFTER PAUL

As noted above (p. 187), one of several key issues Paul felt obliged to address in 1 Corinthians was what constituted proper behaviour for Christian women in their diverse conditions of existence (e.g., single, married, widowed), especially *vis-à-vis* the males of the community. While Paul's response to the unconventional behaviour of the church's married prophetesses in particular not only represents something of an accommodation to traditional Mediterranean values of honour and shame (1 Cor. 11:2–16, especially verses 14–15) but also conspicuously lacks the radical 'there is no male and female' teaching found in Gal. 3:28 (1 Cor. 12:13: 'Jews or Greeks, slaves or free'), he still assumes that Christian women, even married ones, will be inspired by the Spirit to produce prophetic utterances (1 Cor. 11:4–5; Wire 1990: 126), which entail a ministry of speech to other members of the church, including men (1 Cor. 14:3–5). But just as important, despite Paul's concern in this context with the church's reputation among outsiders (cf. 1 Cor. 14:23–5), he does not employ any form of Graeco-Roman traditional household code, which, with its blend of androcentric values and conventional hierarchies, he undoubtedly would have used had he been as misogynistic as he is sometimes perceived.

All this stands in marked contrast with certain features of Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus), each of which is understood here to have been composed by one student or another of Paul's after the master's death. Colossians, for instance, not only omits the 'no male and female' line from its version of the baptismal formula (Col. 3:11), but also contains a traditional household code with the usual hierarchies (Col. 3:18–4:1) – wives in particular owing submission to their husbands (Col. 3:18) – even though the letter gives no indication that the behaviour of women in particular had contributed to the Colossian church's distinctive problems (Fiorenza 1983: 251–3). The comparable code of household ethics in Eph. 5:21–6:9, moreover, in which the husband/wife relationship is the dominant concern (5:21–33), should probably be placed even closer to conventional norms (and thus further away from the ethos of 1 Corinthians.), especially since the Ephesian letter's original function as instruction for a whole network of churches entails that it was probably first received by a broad audience whose circumstances and problems must have varied widely.⁸ And finally, if, as suggested above, Paul himself can be seen to have allowed concerns about the church's reputation among outsiders to shape his instruction to the Christian women of Corinth, then the author of the Pastoral Epistles has gone yet further towards permitting his teaching on women to be influenced by considerations of public opinion (Meeks

1993: 64); for although 1 Corinthians and the Pastorals (the latter understood here as a single unit) imply situations that have much in common, so that in each, for instance, there are implied denials of a future resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12; 2 Tim. 2:18), strong tendencies towards asceticism among believing women (1 Cor. 7:1–9; 1 Tim. 5:11–15), and public criticism by outsiders that could damage the churches' evangelistic efforts (1 Cor. 14:23–5; Titus 2:3–8; MacDonald 1996: 161–2), the response of the Pastorals to this situation differs from that of 1 Corinthians in at least three striking ways. First of all, the author of the Pastorals unambivalently discourages women from embracing a form of asceticism which, by devaluing the body and physical procreation, tended to disrupt the order of traditional households (1 Tim. 2:15; 5:14; Bassler 1996: 30); second, he emphatically requires women to be silent in the context of worship (1 Tim. 2:11–12); and third, he does not merely acknowledge but virtually foregrounds the causal link between his advice regarding females *inside* the church and his worries about the opinions of critics *outside* it (1 Tim. 5:7, 14; Titus 2:3–5). Accordingly, and especially in view of the first two of these distinctive features, the world-view opposed by the author of the Pastorals is best understood as either an early form of Gnosticism or an amalgam of beliefs and practices out of which Gnosticism eventually developed (Rudolph 1983: 302–3; Bassler 1996: 27–8).

On a superficial reading, this shift from Paul's virtually emancipatory disposition regarding women to the more publicly respectable position commended by some of his earliest heirs may seem to have little relation to the aforementioned process of gentilization from the days of the Hellenists to the martyrdom of Ignatius. A closer inspection, however, suggests that at least from the ministry of Paul to the time of Ignatius, the ethics of gender and the politics of ethnicity were deeply and complicatedly interconnected, so that significant developments in one were almost certain to be accompanied by changes in the other (Brown 1988: 61–4). Particularly during Paul's career, for instance, although developments in either of these areas must have directly impacted the other on occasion, a more pervasive and powerful influence on both was probably the experiential phenomenon of ecstatic trance, or 'altered states of consciousness'.⁹ Understood by the believers themselves as possession by the Spirit of God, and conceptualized chiefly in terms of prophetic speech and 'tongues' (i.e., glossalalia), these experiences had profound effects on the participants' understandings of their respective identities and levels of status (1 Cor. 12–14; cf. Esler 1994: 42, 47–50).

Now just as the Spirit was powerfully involved in both the Pauline mission's inclusion of gentiles (Gal. 3:1–5) and its appeal to women (1 Cor. 11:2–16), so also the Spirit had to be involved in any successful adaptation the churches might make to the new contexts in which Paul's immediate successors found themselves. Of strategic importance, though, the sort of involvement these successors assigned to the Spirit consisted of neither a simple perpetuation of the Spirit's ecstatic legitimization of socio-religious and psychological change (e.g., inclusion of gentiles in the people of God and the emancipation of women to adopt unconventional roles), nor an extension of the same sorts of functions into new areas. Rather, because a number of predominantly gentile churches were now well established, and one of the most conspicuous obstacles to further growth was the damage done to the church's

reputation by reports about the unconventional behaviour of its female members (see e.g. 1 Tim. 5:3–7, 14), what the authors of the Deutero-Pauline literature did was reconceptualize the Spirit in terms of conduct and virtues that were less conducive to ecstasy and social experimentation than to cohesion with the established norms of the church's Graeco-Roman environment, a development capable of being construed in the light of Max Weber's notion of the routinization of charisma (MacDonald 1988); and in order to legitimate this reconceptualization the authors both explicitly identified their compositions with Paul's name, and gave them a suitably Pauline effect by adapting appropriate Pauline traditions and theological formulas (e.g., Eph. 2:8–9; Col. 2:11–12; 2 Tim. 1:9–10), whose authority could be utilized for a variety of purposes wherever there happened to be Christians who held Paul's name in honour. Consequently, the co-occurrence in each of these letters of an exclusively gentile intratextual audience on the one hand, and the type of perspectives outlined above regarding women on the other, is by no means a coincidence; rather, it represents an ideological adjustment to social and religious changes that had probably impacted all the churches in Paul's sphere of influence.

Like all corpora of tradition that become invested with authority, however, the teachings of Paul became the site of many social and intellectual contests. For instance, the type of perspective which the author of the Pastorals was attempting to correct is probably understood best as deriving from Paul himself (Lüdemann 1996: 135–8), whose own platonized subordination of the human body of fleshly difference to the one universal Spirit of sameness (Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 12:4–11) lent itself to recontextualizations of a gnostic disposition. Similarly, the reference in 2 Pet. 3:15–16 to destructive misunderstandings of Paul's eschatology and ethics suggests that the author's implied opponents were probably Paulinized gnostics who, quite like some of Paul's own converts in Corinth, clearly belonged in some sense to the church (2 Pet. 2:1–3, 13–16, 18–22) but none the less appeared – in the eyes of at least some of their Christian neighbours – to be morally lax (2 Pet. 2:10, 18–19; 3:17), antipathetic to the church's established sources of authority (1:16–18; 2:10–12; 3:2), and ensnared by the deceit of an over-realized eschatology (1:19–21; 3:3–7, 14–16). And finally, the phenomenon of Nicolaitanism in Rev. 2:6, 15, although it is not explicitly linked in the text to Paul, has been convincingly reconstructed by several recent interpreters (e.g., Hemer 1986: 91–4) as a rather free use of Paul's principle of adaptability to legitimate Christian participation in the imperial cult.

The Pastoral Epistles, 2 Peter and Revelation, then, offer glimpses into various types of issues that were agitating different churches around a single point in time, either shortly before or soon after Ignatius of Antioch proceeded to his martyrdom. Despite their diversity, however, all these writings imply contexts in which Christ-followers, in some cases the authors of the texts, in other instances their audiences, and in yet others both, were struggling to find the optimal way of relating to the predominantly pagan modes of thinking and behaving of their cultural context. On the one hand, as discussed above, missionary success and institutional survival required the churches to internalize many of this cultural system's values; but on the other, in order to maintain their claim to ancient origins and legitimacy, the churches could not afford to relinquish the authority and prestige of Jewish scripture, notwithstanding the Herculean challenge of interpretative redescription it

posed for early Christian theologians and exegetes. In the decades that followed, Christian groups that failed to steer a cautious course between these two tracks (e.g., the Marcionites and the Ebionites), leaning conspicuously towards one side or the other, would come to be labelled by the increasingly dominant centre as deviant or 'heretical'; and, not unrelatedly, these same groups also tended to lack the distinctive combination of given and new culture necessary for missionary success in the competition for devoted converts and adherents.

It is not difficult to see how the particular configuration of given and new culture that was emerging as the dominant pattern in the churches at the turn of the century (c. 90–110 CE) could have nurtured the type of social and ethnic constituency inferred at the beginning of this study from Ignatius' letter to the Magnesians. For instance, while the Jewishness of the Christ movement's founders and scriptures helped to assure that at least some Jews would be found among the churches' converts well into the second century and even beyond, the early successes of the gentile mission and the related endurance of Paul's reduction of Jewish legal observance to a non-essential matter of taste made it increasingly difficult for 'Christianity' (as we can begin to call it in the second century) to persuade Jews that it was a genuinely Jewish movement. Furthermore, although Paul aimed to see the oneness of Jew and gentile in Christ realized in social and ecclesial practice (e.g., in mixed dining and table fellowship; Esler 1998: 93–116), the practical complications that stood in the way of this goal during his own ministry (cf. Gal. 2:11–14) would have been equally problematic in the decades after his death. In practice it must have been much simpler for most groups of Jewish Christ-followers to keep themselves apart from the gentile members of the movement. And finally, the reconceptualization by these Jewish believers of the kingdom of God as spiritual and deterritorial, as well as their belief in a Messiah who had neither established the kingdom in the form most Jews had anticipated nor had returned as soon as his followers had expected, must have sounded irrelevant (if not offensive) in the intensely nationalistic atmosphere of Palestine during the first two centuries. For during this period the Jews of Palestine fought two major wars against the Romans for the sake of values – their ancestral law and traditions, for instance, and the holy land of Israel – that Christians had already compromised (Alexander 1992: 22–3).

Thus, although the end of the first century CE saw nothing like a general or complete split between the Christ-movement and the form of Judaism that was then emerging from the wreckage of the Jews' first revolt against Rome (i.e., rabbinism), the socio-cultural dynamics that ultimately led to such a separation were already making themselves felt among the movement's members in their diverse circumstances throughout the Mediterranean East. Some of the most influential forces in this process – for instance, the progressive devaluation of the Torah as a means of maintaining Jewish identity and distinctiveness – were operative in the movement's first missionary endeavours among the gentiles and have therefore been treated above; others, however, such as the impact of the Bar Kochba revolt (132–5 CE), the gradual acquisition and consolidation of power among Jews by the rabbis from c. 70 to 200 CE, and the growing visibility of Christian varieties of Gnosticism (whose metaphysical systems in many instances have a strongly anti-Judaic, or at least anti-biblical, tenor), exerted either most or all of their influence in the second century

and afterwards (Wilson 1995: 288–97). Accordingly, any comprehensive account of the relationship between the early mission of Christ-followers to the gentiles and the eventual emergence of Christianity as a cultural entity distinct from Judaism must deal with developments that took place in the centuries directly following the chronological limits of the present chapter. To others, then, we leave the task of interpreting these later processes, many of which are discussed in other contributions to this volume.

NOTES

- 1 Inquiry into the usage of the Greek word for ‘Hebrews’ (*Hebraios*) and its cognate forms strengthens the sense that, from Luke’s point of view, more than language habits distinguished the Hebrews from the Hellenists. Although the noun used in Acts 6.1 occurs nowhere else in Luke-Acts, it does occur in 2 Cor. 11:22 and Phil. 3:5, where in both cases it clearly signifies Jewish descent and religious identity. Of course, one may wish to urge, as does Hill (1992: 47–8), that Pauline usage should not be invoked to solve an exegetical conundrum in Luke-Acts; but however fine this sentiment is in theoretical principle, it should not be allowed to obscure a potentially more important consideration – and one that Hill appears to ignore – namely, how the author of Luke-Acts uses the cognate term *Hebrais*. Most importantly, in each of this term’s occurrences in Acts (21:40; 22:2; 26:14) it not only refers to the most commonly used language in Palestine at this time (i.e., Aramaic), but also implies the existence of a special bond of social and cultural solidarity among those who speak this language. For interesting discussion of how a speaker’s choice of language in this kind of multilingual environment can tacitly convey a wide range of social, political and ethnic alignments (and antagonisms), see Trudgill (1983: 53–4, 149–50).
- 2 Yet the rarity and usage of *Christianos* in the New Testament (only at Acts 11.26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16) suggest that it did not become a term of self-designation until the late first or early second century CE.
- 3 On the phenomenon of escalation see the useful discussion in Pruitt and Rubin (1986: 62–87). Challenge-and-response in the Mediterranean context is dealt with generally by Malina (1993: 34–7) and, in relation to Paul’s relationships with the Jerusalem ‘Hebrews’, by Esler (1998: 117–40).
- 4 For a view similar to this, advocating that Paul persecuted the early ‘congregation of God’ (Gal. 1:13) for much the same reasons that his Galatian congregations were later under pressure, see Esler (1998: 122–4).
- 5 For an original and impressively argued interpretation of Romans that understands the missionary-theological strategy of the letter, and indeed of Paul in general, as largely consonant with the Lucan story of Paul, see Nanos (1996: 242–7).
- 6 See e.g. Luke 4:1–3; Acts 10:9–10; 13:2–3; Col. 2:16–20; and *Papyri Graecae Magicae* 4.733–9. For further discussion of the role of abstinence in ancient religious trance and ecstasy, see Fowden (1986: 83–4) and Dodds (1951: 140–1).
- 7 This is a currently popular view; contra, see Esler (1998: 203–4), who argues that in Gal. 5:14 Paul means that through (the Spirit’s gift of) *agapē* Christ-believers have the best that the Law can provide but from an entirely different source.
- 8 The idea that Ephesians was originally conceptualized as an encyclical for several churches, rather than as a contextually more specific letter like, say, Galatians, is suggested chiefly by the absence of the Greek phrase translated ‘in Ephesus’ from Eph. 1:1 in

several of the earliest manuscripts for the text. For further discussion see Metzger (1975: 601).

- 9 For a recent and provocative discussion of the role of possession trance and altered states of consciousness in the missionary success of Jesus' earliest followers, see Davies (1995: 170–203).

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THE JESUS TRADITION

The gospel writers' strategies of persuasion



Richard L. Rohrbaugh

The writers of the canonical gospels seek to persuade. They try to convince readers of the truth of the story of Jesus. Sometimes they write in order to elicit belief, at other times to confirm or solidify it. But in either case they seek to persuade, and it is primarily their strategies for persuasion that will be of interest to us in what follows. Not all of these strategies are obvious to readers in modern, Western societies.

Analysis of the strategies used by gospel writers to craft persuasive stories has most often been done at the literary level. That is, scholars have identified a variety of literary devices through which ancient writers sought to capture readers' attention, hook them into the story and gain their sympathy. Such literary studies are extremely valuable, especially when they draw on the instructions in the art of persuasive writing which developed in ancient rhetorical schools.¹

Yet helpful as these (literary) rhetorical studies have been, they have frequently overlooked a key factor in the way language, including the language of persuasion, actually works. Sociolinguists have demonstrated that language does not derive its meaning at the level of words and sentences, but rather from the social system shared by writer and reader (or speaker and hearer).² That is so because language is itself a form of *social* interaction. Apart from a shared social context, which is actually a creation of language, and which leads both speaker and listener to bring similar expectations to a conversation, words and sentences are meaningless. Indeed without a shared social system, meanings are often significantly confused, as any cross-cultural conversation is likely to demonstrate. Recognizing the patterns of persuasion in ancient writing is therefore as much a matter of understanding the (shared) ancient social system as it is the literary conventions that were taught in the rhetorical schools.

Another way to make this same point derives from speech accommodation theory (Malina 1994; Giles *et al.* 1987). The basic idea is that speakers or writers tend to accommodate language to their audiences in order to gain some social goal. Therefore if the gospel writers are interested in persuading readers to believe the Jesus story, we should expect to find language-accommodation in their accounts. Obviously, however, language that accommodates to and thus attracts or persuades one reader (linguistic convergence) may simultaneously repel and dissuade another read-

er (linguistic divergence). Thus, as we will have occasion to see, the Jesus story told one way probably attracted non-literate, rural peasants. Yet told that same way it would likely have repelled members of the literate elite. By watching the way the gospel writers shape the Jesus traditions in order to accommodate and converge with their respective audiences we can gain important clues to their persuasive power.

In what follows we shall concentrate on persuasive strategies which are dependent on the shared social system of the ancient Mediterranean world.³ That is, we shall concentrate on social imperatives rather than literary form – not because the latter is unimportant but because it has been more often studied. Moreover, since space does not permit us to examine these matters comprehensively, we shall seek only to illustrate the phenomenon of social accommodation by looking briefly at one such strategy in each of the canonical gospels.

We shall begin with the Gospel of Mark. We do so not only because it was the first of the canonical gospels written, but also because its social location provides a strong contrast to that of the later writers (Matthew and Luke) who used it. Moreover, offering some detail on the social location of the Marcan story will enable us to show the contrast in the Matthean and Lucan alternatives clearly. Our first objective then will be to determine what kind of story Mark tells. At what social group is it being pitched? With whom is solidarity being sought? Who might find it attractive or offensive? Whom does it hope to persuade? In short, what is this author's strategy in the *social* interaction he undertakes with his readers?



Figure 8.1 The Sea of Galilee, looking eastwards towards Gergesa (Matt. 8.28) and the region of Gaulonitis. Photo Richard Rohrbach.

THE SOCIAL LOCATION OF MARK'S STORY

We begin with the 'social location' of the Jesus story in Mark. The notion of a social location is not difficult to grasp, though its importance has been little recognized in New Testament scholarship.⁴ A social location is simply a position in a social system shared by a group of people. A generation, an occupational group, or a social class might be examples. Such collections of people are not 'groups', in the sense that they are personally acquainted, but rather they are persons who occupy a common position in the social system and therefore share certain kinds of lived experience. In some cases even certain processes such as competition or conflict can qualify as social locations. Moreover, such social locations are important because they provide the context in which meanings are shared. They do not *cause* certain ways of thinking, but they do make a limited range of ideas or values appear as plausible alternatives to most people. We need therefore to find a social location, a shared position in the social system, which offers a vantage point from which to think about the persuasive power of the Jesus traditions.

Social stratification

The overwhelming importance of social stratification in ancient Mediterranean societies makes the issue of stratification an ideal choice to meet our needs. It offers us *one* valuable vantage point (among many that are possible) from which to assess the rhetorical strategy of each gospel writer.⁵ The working assumption underlying this choice is that a Jesus story pitched to appeal to rural peasants would probably have a less positive impact on members of the urban elite. Since Jesus was transparently a village artisan of very low social status, telling his story to village peasants might present a relatively simple rhetorical challenge. But how would a gospel writer tell the Jesus story for an elite urban audience which considered village artisans unworthy of imitation? That is a key question we are trying to answer.

In order to make effective use of this particular social location we need first to be clear about the extent and scope of social stratification in antiquity. It is hard for people in the modern, industrial societies of the West to understand the pervasiveness of class conflict in ancient social relations. Yet it was a universal feature of the agrarian social system (Ste. Croix 1981) and impacted on everyone in those societies all of the time. Moreover, when we take into account the fact that the gospels reflect the circumstances during (Mark) and shortly after (Matthew, Luke, John) the Jewish–Roman war (66–73 CE), social stratification becomes all the more important. As David Fiensy has shown, sharp ideological conflict over land ownership existed at the time the revolt broke out. The Israelite elite had come to see land as capital to be exploited, while peasants retained the older view that all the land was owned by Yahweh and given to Israelite families as inalienable plots meant to ensure family subsistence (Fiensy 1991: 1–20; Oakman 1986: 38). Hostility was thus in large measure a rural–urban matter in which the Zealot revolutionaries were closely identified with rural peasants. In Galilee especially, peasant hostility was aimed primarily at the cities (Horsley 1989: 87). The focus of the dispute was escalating debt and the subsequent loss of peasant land to the urban elite (Ste. Croix 1981: 7–19;

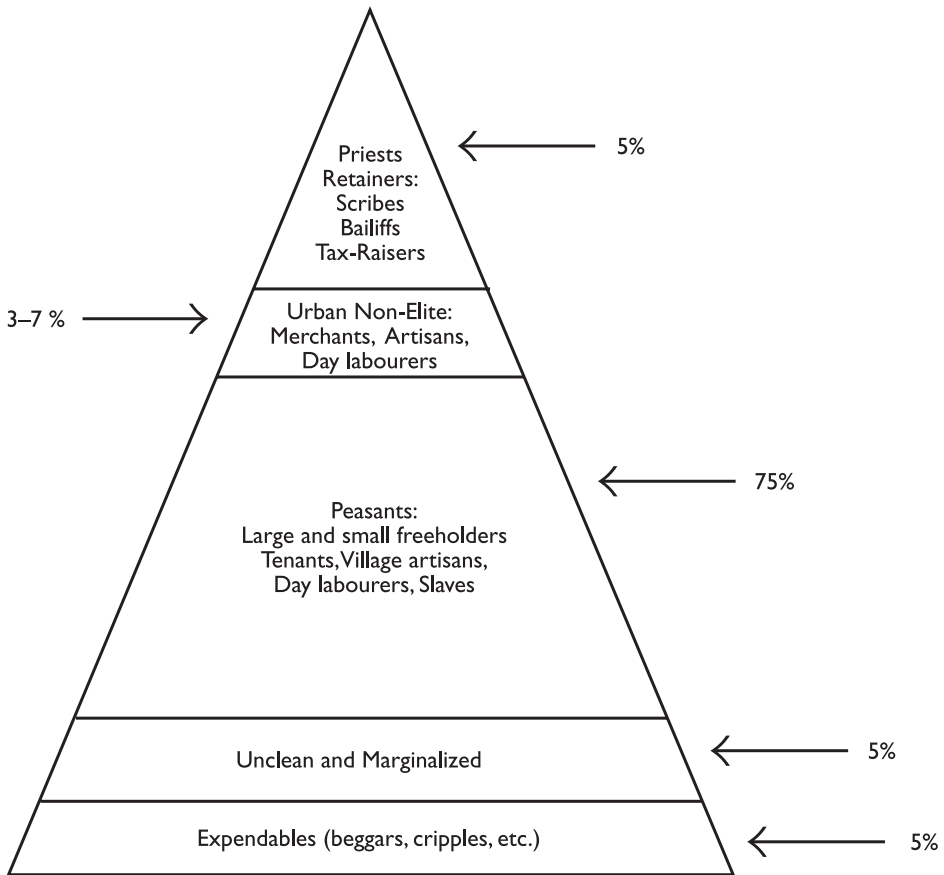


Figure 8.2 The social structure of Herodian Palestine. Based on Lenski and Lenski (1987).

Brunt 1977: 151; Rostovzeff 1957). Or as Richard Horsley and John Hanson put it, ‘The Zealots, no matter how much their struggle was against the alien Roman oppressors, were first fighting a class war against their own Jewish nobility’ (Horsley and Hanson 1985: 226).

Stratification and the conflict it caused were thus an undeniable part of the social location of the gospels. It affected both authors and audiences. In order to understand this in more detail, however, it will be necessary to describe key social groups which would have been present in or had an impact on life in the area in which the first gospel (Mark) was produced: the villages and small towns of upper Galilee, southern Syria or Transjordan.⁶ To structure our comments we will refer to the above diagrammatic description of social relationships in the Herodian period which is typical of advanced agrarian societies. It offers a good look at the socially stratified society in which Mark constructed his story of Jesus.

A brief description of five groups noted in Figure 8.2 will suffice to specify the respective positions in the social order which concern us. Each represents a different



Figure 8.3 Palestine in Hellenistic and Roman times. From Freyne (1998), with the author's permission.



Figure 8.4 Ancient grain mill found near Capernaum. Photo Richard Rohrbaugh.

social location in a system of stratification. Each is likewise a potential audience for a gospel. As we go through the groups we shall carefully specify their presence in Mark's story in order to draw what conclusions we can about the rhetorical strategy he uses to persuade his readers. We will then go on to each of the other gospels in order to show the contrasts.

The Urban elite

As Figure 8.2 makes clear, the urban elite made up about 2 per cent of the total population. Along with the ruler, it included the highest ranking military officers, ranking priestly families, the Herodians and other aristocratic families. Their wealth was based primarily on land ownership and taxation, which effectively drained the resources of the rural areas.⁷ Being the only group with disposable income, they constituted the only real 'market' in the ancient economy.

This group maintained near total control of writing, coinage, taxation, and of the military and judicial systems. Their control was aided by a religious and intellectual elite who typically became the keepers of what scholars call the 'Great Tradition'. Their mannerisms, vocabulary, speech patterns and dress made the elite easily identifiable on the streets. While they remained physically, socially and culturally isolated from the rest of the society, their behaviour and lifestyle set the standard for the social aspirations of everyone else. The urban elite we can identify in the Gospel of Mark are listed in Figure 8.5.

Social conflict is prevalent in the Gospel of Mark and much of it derives from the interaction between villagers and those listed in Figure 8.5 (note that *all* of Jesus' opponents come from this group or its retainers). Especially prominent on the Figure 8.5 list are the scribes. Evidence from ancient papyri suggests they often acted as agents of the urban aristocracy from whom they received rural appointments (Loeb, *Select Papyri II: Non-Literary (Public Documents)*, IX.339: 393). Mark's readers,

Caesar 12:14, 17	Strong man 3:27
Pontius Pilate 15:2, 8, 15	Those who have 4:25
Rulers of the Gentiles 10:42	Elders 8:31; 11:27; 14:43, 53; 15:1
Herod 6:14; 8:15	Rich man 10:22
Herodias 6:17	Wealthy 10:23, 25
Herodias' daughter 6:22	Vineyard owner and son 12:1, 6
Philip 6:17	Sadducees 12:18
Governors 13:9; 15:16	Family of seven brothers 12:20
High priest 2:26; 14:47, 53, 54, 60, 61, 63, 66	Rich people 12:41
Chief priests 8:31; 10:33; 11:18, 27; 14:1, 10, 43, 53, 55; 15:1, 3, 10, 11, 31	Kings 13:9
Scribes 1:22; 2:6, 16; 3:22; 7:1, 5; 8:31; 9:11, 14; 10:33; 11:18, 27; 12:28, 35, 38; 14:1, 43, 53; 15:1, 31	Man going on a journey 13:34
	Owner of upper room 14:14
	Joseph of Arimathea 15:43
	Jairus and his family 5:22, 23, 40

Figure 8.5 The urban elite in the Gospel of Mark

of course, are warned to 'beware of the scribes, who like to go about in long robes, and to have salutations in the market places and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widow's houses and for a pretense make long prayers' (12:38–40).

In Mark's passion narrative the scribes link up with Pharisees, elders (non-priestly aristocrats) and chief priests in opposition to Jesus. The Herodians and Sadducees join the opposition as well (12:13–17, 18–27; 3:1–6). Mark predicts that these groups will not only reject Jesus but destroy him in the end (10:33). None the less it should be noted that three persons on the list above are exceptions to the near-universal opposition of the elite to Jesus: the scribe who is 'not far from the kingdom' (12:34), Joseph of Arimathea (15:43), and Jairus (5:21–43). These story-characters prevent us from excluding members of the elite from Jesus' following and may indicate that some such were part of the Marcan community.

Retainers

At the lower levels of the elite group and ranging downward towards non-elite levels were those whom social scientists call retainers. These included lower level military officers, officials and bureaucrats such as clerks and bailiffs, personal retainers, household servants, scholars, legal experts and lower level lay aristocracy. They worked primarily in the service of the elite and often acted as the brokers between the aristocracy and the rest of the population. What power they had depended on their relation to the urban elite.

It is interesting that we see more people here (Figure 8.6) who are followers of

Pharisees 2:16, 18, 24; 3:6; 7:1, 3, 5; 8:11, 15; 10:2; 12:13	Physicians 2:17; 5:26
People from Jairus' house 5:35	Galilean priest 1:44
Men arresting John the Baptist 6:17	Courtiers, officers 6:21
Soldier of the guard 6:27	Judas Iscariot 14:11
Levi 2:14	Tax collectors 2:15, 16
Those selling in the temple 11:15	Moneychangers 11:15
Servant-girl of high priest 14:66	Doorkeeper 13:34
Crowd sent from chief priests, scribes and elders 14:43	Soldiers 15:16
	Centurion 15:39
	Slave/servant 1:20; 9:35; 10:43, 44; 12:2, 4; 13:34; 14:47

Figure 8.6 Retainers in the Gospel of Mark

Jesus (the people from Jairus' house, Levi, tax collectors and the centurion) than we found in the elite group. But the largest group on the list are the Pharisees and they stand in opposition. In Mark they appear to be literate, local village leaders (in Mark, contra Josephus, the Pharisees are in Jerusalem only in 12:13) whom Anthony Saldarini characterizes as a group of retainers competing with the Jesus groups for influence among the non-elite (1988: 71).

In a controversy over ritual cleanliness (2:13–17, 7:1–23) Mark explains for his audience that Pharisees and Judaeans (usually translated, incorrectly, 'Jews'; see the comments on the Gospel of John, p. 220) wash themselves and their eating vessels in keeping with the 'tradition of the elders'. This of course is the Great Tradition of the literate aristocracy that few peasants could afford to uphold. Note that in Mark's story Jesus' disciples are clearly identified with this peasant inability (7:5) and that Mark's scribes show the typical aristocratic incomprehension of peasant attitudes or capabilities (*Why* do your disciples . . .?). In his retort Jesus not only defends the peasant attitude, but offers another example (7:9–13) in which he distances himself from the practices of the elite ('your' tradition).

Before leaving these two dominant groups it is worth noting the sheer number of such people in Mark's story. That is surprising since little of Mark's story takes place in the cities where the elite and most of their retainers lived. Yet it must be remembered that it was by means of rural appointments given to retainers that the elite maintained their control in the rural areas.

Urban non-elite

A third group on Figure 8.2, the urban non-elite, plays a very minor role in Mark's story (Figure 8.7). It included small-scale merchants, artisans, day labourers and a variety of service workers. In most agrarian societies this group represented about 3–7 per cent of the total population. Their health and nutrition were often worse than in the villages and life expectancies were shorter: a child born among the lower classes in the city of Rome during the first century had a life expectancy of only 20

Those buying in the temple (likely includes peasants) 11:15
 Crowd/people 1:5; 11:18, 32; 12:12, 37, 41; 14:2, 43; 15:8, 11, 15
 Widow 12:42

Figure 8.7 Urban poor in the Gospel of Mark

years (Lenski and Lenski 1987: 249). Given the high death rates among the urban poor, the cities were able to absorb a constant stream of such persons from the rural areas with little or no gain in total population.

Because so little of Mark's story takes place in the urban areas we are not surprised that this group plays an insignificant role in the overall story. In fact, there is only one such person here who can be clearly identified. The widow in 12:42 is being unwittingly victimized by the redistributive economic system of the temple.

Degraded, unclean and expendables

Outside the walls of every ancient city lived the outcasts: beggars, prostitutes, itinerant day labourers, tanners, pedlars, bandits, sailors, gamblers, ass drivers, usurers, dung collectors and even some merchants. They were present in both villages and cities, though much more numerous in the latter. All such persons were forced out of the cities at night when gates were locked, but frequented the cities during the daytime to beg or find work. While not a large portion of the total population, one encountered these people everywhere. The living conditions and life chances of most of them were appalling.

Here we meet a surprise. Though outcasts were a relatively small percentage of the total population, there are 22 references to them in Mark's story (Figure 8.8). Eight times Mark gives us a summary of Jesus' interaction with them (1:28, 32–4, 45; 3:7–10; 6:31–4, 54–6; 7:36–7). Moreover, Mark wants us to know early on in his story that Jesus' healing activity among this group of people is a major reason for the reputation he develops (1:28). Two of the types listed above, swineherds and porters,

Man with an unclean spirit 1:23	Syro-Phoenician woman and
The sick and demon possessed 1:32–4,	daughter 7:25, 26
39; 6:9, 13, 55; 9:38	Deaf man with speech impediment
Leper 1:40	7:32
Paralytic 2:3	Blind man 8:22
Man with withered hand 3:1	Boy with an unclean spirit 9:14
Those who have nothing 4:25	Blind Bartimaeus 10:46
Demoniac 5:2	Simon the Leper 14:3
Haemorrhaging woman 5:25	Swineherds 5:14
	Man carrying a jar 14:13

Figure 8.8 Outcasts mentioned in the Gospel of Mark

practised despised occupations. The Syro-Phoenician woman may originally have been a person of higher status, though with a daughter afflicted by an unclean spirit villagers probably considered her a social deviant or perhaps even dangerous (Theissen 1984).

Rural peasants and other villagers

In agrarian societies 85 per cent of the population lived in villages and were engaged in farming or extracting raw materials. They included freeholding peasants, tenant farmers, day labourers, slaves and the various landless groups such as fishermen, artisans and other craftsmen.

While estimating standards of living for freeholding peasants has proved a difficult task, there is little doubt that minimal survival levels were common. Yields were both low and unstable (Oakman 1986: 26), hence peasant debt leading to loss of land was widespread (Oakman 1986: 57; Horsley 1989: 88–90; Fiensy 1991: 93; Goodman 1982: 417–27).

Aristocratic control of major portions of the arable land is well documented for the period following the revolt of 66 CE. On much of the land, therefore, absentee landowners were forced to employ tenant farmers, landless labourers and slaves in producing their crops (Fiensy 1991: 75–85). They often turned to cash-crops such as grapes rather than stick with subsistence-crops like wheat and barley. Rents for tenants could go as high as two-thirds of a crop, though rabbinic sources more commonly mention figures ranging from one-fourth to one-half. While day labourers and slaves were often employed during the off season as cooks, messengers, scribes, manure gatherers, barbers, thorn gatherers, or building workers (Fiensy 1991: 86), they did much of the field work for large landowners during planting and harvest seasons. Of course anyone without land of their own was near the bottom of the social-economic scale.

In addition to those already mentioned, most village and rural areas contained at least several other groups. Lower level retainers and lay aristocrats often provided village leadership. Artisans, craftsmen, fishermen and herders were common as well, though few artisans or craftsmen could make a living in the smaller villages and therefore had to work in several locations. Because they lacked land or status, artisans usually had no means of making advantageous marriages. Family continuity was therefore somewhat precarious. It is of course among this last group that we must locate Jesus. The gospels call Jesus a *tekton* in Greek. It is usually translated ‘carpenter’, but it could refer to any kind of worker in metal or wood. Legend has it that the family of Jesus made the yokes for oxen, which if true would place them among the poorest of the poor.

For all of these rural groups life was always at the margins of sustainability. In addition, fraud, robbery, forced imprisonment or labour, beatings, inheritance disputes and forcible removal of rents were common. There are fifteen reports or stories of violence in the Gospel of Mark alone (1:14, 45; 3:6, 27; 5:3; 6:16–28; 10:33–4; 12:1–8, 40, 41–4; 13:9–13; 14:1, 43–8; 15:7, 15–20). Widows, aged parents without children or parents of abnormal children, the very young, the very old, those with diseases or deformities and those without land were the most common victims.

Suspicion of outsiders, fear and distrust of literate officials, and hatred of anyone who threatened subsistence were the social constants of ancient village life. In sum, poor housing, non-existent sanitation, constant violence, economically inaccessible medical care and bad diet – as much as one-fourth of a male Palestinian peasant's calorie intake came from alcohol (Broshi 1989: 41–56) – leave us a long way from the world of the urban elite.

As one might expect, these various groups of rural persons, which were the overwhelming bulk of the population in ancient societies, are prominent throughout the story-world of Mark (Figure 8.9).

Note the frequent mentions of the 'crowd' in the list in Figure 8.9 (Greek: *ochlos*; used 38 times in Mark, translated variously by the NRSV). It is Mark's equivalent for *'ām hā' āreš*: those poor uneducated peasants outside the law. It may also be an indicator of the social location of his own audience (Ahn Byung-mu 1981: 139ff.; also Myers 1988: 156). The rabbis of course taught that observant Jews should neither eat nor travel with the *'ām hā' āreš* though the Jesus of Mark did both (e.g., 2:13 ff.; 8:1 ff., *et al.*). Those on the list from the Judean countryside (1:5), the sower (4:5), the tenants (12:1) the crowd (*passim*) and most of the other rural persons listed in Figure 8.9 were probably peasant farmers. As noted above, Jesus and his family were artisans. Though Mark does not mention the Bethlehem tradition, if Jesus' family was originally Judean we can assume that a predecessor there lost the land or they would not be trying to make a living in a tiny Galilean village.

Those from the Judean countryside	Little ones 9:42
1:5	Children 10:13
Peter, Andrew 1:16	Bystanders in Bethphage 11:5
James, John, Zebedee 1:19–20	Those buying in the temple (likely
Simon's mother-in-law 1:30	included urban poor as well) 11:15
Sower 4:3	Tenants 12:1
Seed scatterer 4:26	Simon of Cyrene 15:21
Mary 6:3	Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of
James, Josés, Judas, Simon and Jesus	James Josés, Salome 15:40
6:3	
Jesus' sisters 6:3	
Crowd 2:4, 13; 3:9, 20, 32; 4:1, 36;	
5:21, 24, 27, 30, 31; 6:14, 17, 34,	
39, 45; 7:14, 17, 33; 8:1; 2, 6, 34;	
9:14, 15, 17, 25; 10:1, 46	

Figure 8.9 Peasants or villagers in the Gospel of Mark

MARK'S STORY OF JESUS

In looking over the five lists of characters in Mark cited (Figures 8.5–8.9), we can safely say that his story-world (which may or may not coincide with the real world) genuinely recreates the sharply stratified agrarian society. Moreover, having described this world we are now in a position to ask our primary questions. At whom is this story pitched? What would make it convincing? With whom is Mark intending linguistic convergence? With whom is linguistic divergence a likely possibility? And finally, from the vantage point of our chosen social location, stratification, what would make this story compelling?

It is not difficult to detect a certain defensiveness on Mark's part as he tells the story of Jesus' conflicts with the elite. His Jesus repeatedly disregards the ritual standards to which the elite conformed as Israelites. He violates purity rules regarding persons (1:41; 2:13–14; 4:35–42; 5:24–8; 5:41; 7:24–30; 7:31) by coming in contact with the diseased, the dead, the malformed and the possessed. He violates rules about the body (7:33; 8:23), about meal practice (6:37–44; 8:1–10), about times (2:24; 3:1–6) and about places (11:15–16; 12:33). Opponents admit Jesus' power, but (3:22–7) claim it has its origin in Satan. Demons, however, designate Jesus the 'Holy One of God' (1:24).

Mark's defence of Jesus is a spirited one. In both the baptism (1:10–11) and transfiguration (9:2–8) scenes, God acknowledges nothing less than kinship with Jesus. Mark also claims that the Scriptures offer justification (2:25–6; 7:6; 10:5; 11:17) for Jesus' actions – even though others judge them to be purity violations. He also quotes Jesus' saying that evil comes from inside the human heart rather than anything contacting the body from outside (7:18–23).

Comments about such purity issues in Mark have long since become a scholarly commonplace. None the less, they frequently overlook a critical fact of *peasant* life: Jesus may have been seen as unholy and unwashed by the religious elite, and his behaviour may have seemed to them iconoclastic or even perverse, but *to a peasant it would have been nothing out of the ordinary at all*. Most peasants could not maintain the Great Tradition even if they wanted to. They came in constant contact with bodily secretions, dead animals and unwashed food. Farming practices could not await sabbaths and holy days: in dry-land farming with marginal or uneven rainfall, each day that passes between the first rains and ploughing reduces the final yields. Nor could they always afford the prescribed sacrifices or guarantee the cleanliness of meal companions.

We must point out, therefore, that the rules the Marcan Jesus breaks having to do with dietary laws, washing, Sabbath observance and temple sacrifice were those which peasants had the most difficulty keeping. Jesus' lifestyle would thus have been familiar to peasants in every respect. His defence of an internal purity rather than the externals of ritual practice might well have shocked them. But his lifestyle as such would not. Mark's argument is thus clear: purity before God is possible within the limits of a peasant way of life. And obviously a key point in relation to Mark's strategy is that in constructing his defence for Jesus, he is also defending his own community (Myers 1988: 35–6).

The conclusion we can draw from all this is that in telling the story of Jesus to



Figure 8.10 Ancient stone olive press. The name Gethsemane meant ‘oil press’ in Aramaic.
Photo Richard Rohrbaugh.

rural villagers, Mark is telling them the story of one of their own kind. The story-Jesus and the readers come from the same social stratum. They occupy the same social location. As a rhetorical strategy this is a classic example of linguistic convergence. By locating his Jesus in the same social space as that occupied by the reader, Mark gains the reader’s sympathy. He attracts and persuades. A story of this type might have had little appeal to a member of the urban elite (linguistic divergence), but it would have been both heartening and persuasive to villagers. They would learn from it that Jesus did what they usually could not do: resist the elite, practice incomplete observance of Torah, and yet claim the protection and care of God.

ALTERNATIVE STORIES OF JESUS

It is assumed by most New Testament scholars that Matthew and Luke are revisions of Mark, hence we can assume that in one way or another they found Mark inadequate for social interaction with their particular audiences. Yet surprisingly they do not change the fundamental nature or structure of the Marcan story. In fact, if we were to list the characters in these two alternative gospels on our charts of the agrarian society, the results would not differ much from those for Mark. The story remains substantially one of Jesus’ ministry to the poor of the rural areas along with his conflict with the urban elite or their retainers.

Both Matthew and Luke, however, have a problem. Their audiences are quite different to Mark's. Matthew's community, for example, has been described as a scribal brotherhood, and indeed many commentators have seen Matt. 13:52 as referring to the scribal status of the author himself (Duling 1995; Overman 1990).⁸ If this is so, Matthew, and perhaps many of his readers, is in the retainer class. It is also clear that Luke writes for an audience higher on the scale than Mark's. He dedicates his Gospel to an elite patron, Theophilus (Robbins 1991; Alexander 1993). Moreover, his criticism of the rich makes clear that they are included in his audience (Karris 1978; Esler 1987). In addition, Matthew and Luke were probably urbanites. As is often noted, Mark tells us that Jesus cannot go openly into a city (1:45), yet Matthew and Luke often locate him there.⁹

This means Matthew and Luke had different readers with whom to create linguistic and social convergence. Obviously they needed different rhetorical strategies if they were to persuade. Elite attitudes towards peasants in antiquity ranged from incomprehension and ignorance to suspicion and contempt. Village artisans, even admirable village artisans, were unlikely to inspire imitation. This meant that Mark's version of the Jesus story would have had little appeal to the audiences of Matthew and Luke. In fact it would more likely have created linguistic divergence than sympathy and belief. We are not surprised, therefore, to find Matthew and Luke amending Mark's rhetorical strategy. A brief consideration of the core social value of Mediterranean antiquity makes clear why this was necessary.

Honour and shame

The core value of the Mediterranean society of the first century was honour. As Philo puts it, honour is that with which 'the majority of mankind are busy' (*Det.* 122). He claims that in Israel the title 'elder' goes not to the aged but to the honourable (*Sob.* 16). The body itself is protected by honour (*Conf.* 18), and people will sacrifice the well-being of their own children to gain it (*Abr.* 184). Aulus Gellius argues that serious punishment is justified in order to protect the honour of an offended party (*Attic Nights* 7.14.2–4). Plutarch acknowledges that the want of honour is deeply painful (*Non Posse* 1100).

The language of honour is likewise pervasive in the New Testament: *timê* (John 4:44; Rom. 2:7, 10; 9:21; 12:10; 1 Cor. 12:23; 1 Thess. 4:4; 1 Tim. 1:17; 5:17; 6:1; 2 Tim. 2:20; Heb. 2:7; 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:7; 2 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 4:9, 11; 5:12; 19:1; 21:26), *timadô* (Matt. 15:8; John 5:23; Acts 28:10), *entimos* (Luke 14:8), *doxa* (John 5:41; 2 Cor. 6:8; Rev. 19:7), *doxadzô* (John 8:54; 1 Cor. 12:26), *endoxos* (1 Cor. 4:10), *timios* (Heb. 13:4); and for dishonour: *atimos* (Matt. 13:57; 1 Cor. 12:23).¹⁰

Very simply, honour was the status one claimed in the community, together with the all-important public recognition of that claim. Honour thus served as the key indicator of social standing and enabled persons to interact with social superiors, equals and inferiors in socially approved fashion. Herodotus provides an interesting example:

When they meet each other in the streets, you may know if the persons meeting are of equal rank by the following token: if they are, instead of

speaking, they kiss each other on the lips. In the case where one is a little inferior to the other, the kiss is given on the cheek; where the difference of rank is great, the inferior prostrates himself upon the ground.

(*History*, 1.134)

It is important to recognize that honour could be either ascribed or acquired. *Ascribed* honour derived from birth. Being born into an honourable family automatically made one honourable in the eyes of the entire community. The status thus gained was given or 'ascribed'. Because ascribed honour derived from birth, all members of the family, both male and female, were at roughly the same honour level.

By contrast, *acquired* honour was a matter of virtue. It was an achievement, a publicly acknowledged worthiness. Most of the gains or losses of honour were small and came as a result of normal daily interaction with others. Moreover, whatever gains one hoped to realize had to take place *in public* because the whole community had to acknowledge a gain in order to validate it. Above all, to claim honour that the community did not recognize was to play the fool.

The honour of one's family had enormous consequences for daily living. It determined potential marriage partners, with whom one could do business, what functions could be attended, where one could live, and even the seating arrangements at a dinner party (Plutarch, *Moralia*, Table-Talk 1.2; 8.615D). Honour also determined who talked and who listened. It legitimated authority. Moreover, since honour was a limited good, if one person won honour, someone else always lost.¹¹ Envy was thus institutionalized and subjected anyone seeking to outdo his neighbours to hostile gossip and the pressure to share.

Moving Jesus Up the Scale

Concern for the honour of Jesus had significant implications for the rhetorical strategies of Matthew and Luke. In fact, Mark's village-artisan Jesus (6:3) was so low on the honour scale (see the place of artisans in Figure 8.2), that in telling his story both Matthew and Luke needed to take dramatic action. How could they gain a sympathetic hearing for an illiterate village artisan among a literate, urban audience?¹² In their worlds an artisan from a village like Nazareth was the kind of person who should be listening, not speaking.

The strategy both Matthew and Luke follow is to move Jesus as far up the honour scale as possible, thereby making him worthy of attention from those in their up-scale audiences. Moreover, attempting to do this they had two basic options. One would be to address the *ascribed* honour status of Jesus, the other to address his *acquired* honour status. Elite audiences of course would expect ascribed and acquired honour to go hand in hand, hence in order to leave no doubt about the matter Matthew and Luke actually make bold use of both options. Given the limits of space, however, we cannot describe these strategies comprehensively. Instead we shall concentrate on illustrating one option with each author. We shall describe Matthew's arguments about Jesus' *ascribed* honour and Luke's regarding his *acquired* honour. Each is a key strategy in the respective author's strategy of persuasion.

Matthew

Let us look first at ascribed honour in the Gospel of Matthew. We have already suggested that this gospel was written for people higher on the socio-economic scale than the readers of Mark and that both author and audience were probably urbanites (Wire 1991: 115–16).¹³ Our argument is therefore that the level of Matthew's audience made it necessary for him to develop a different rhetorical strategy. But to catch the import of the particular strategy Matthew chooses, we must pause for a brief look at the instructions offered in the ancient rhetorical schools for those who learned to write in Greek.

Greek handbooks called *progymnasmata* provided exercises in which students were taught to organize their remarks around a series of conventional topics (Kennedy 1972, 1984, 1994 *passim*). For example, when writing an encomium (a speech or work in praise of someone), Hermogenes instructs his students to begin with the subject's origin and birth. They are to speak of 'race, as the Greek, a city, as Athens, a family as the Alcmaeonidae'. Next, they are told to describe 'what marvelous things befell at birth, as dreams or signs or the like' (cited by Malina and Neyrey 1996: 223, who quote Spengel, *Rhetores Graeci*, 2.14.8–15.5).

This of course is exactly what Matthew does in his story of Jesus' origins. First, he gives Jesus a *royal* genealogy, harking back to the most honoured ancestors of Israel: Abraham and David (1.1–17). Since ascribed honour comes from lineage, this is a brazen honour claim indeed. Moreover, it should be seen for exactly what it is in terms of social location: Matthew has just moved Jesus from one end of the social spectrum to the other. He has located him far above the status of village artisan. Note that in 13:55 when Jesus is challenged and insulted in his home town of Nazareth, those who took offence at him did so by bringing up (1) his status as village artisan and (2) his genealogy. But having read the genealogy Matthew provides, the reader already knows differently.

The importance of genealogies is easy for modern readers to underestimate. In an excellent study of genealogies in antiquity, Rodney Hood points out that in antiquity lineage was not only a source of pride, but also a device for self-aggrandizement (Hood 1961: 3–8). It was a claim to authority, to place, to political or civil rights, various social roles or even the right to speak. Since genealogies justified privilege (office, inheritance, civil, political and economic roles), they also were subject to considerable manipulation. Plutarch tells of a group of writers ingratiating themselves with noble Roman families by producing fictitious genealogies showing descent from Numa Pompilius (*Numa*. 21.2). To have a written pedigree, and especially a long one, was a mark of honour. It established social status (ascribed honour) and thereby provide the all-important map for proper social interaction (Hanson 1989).

As recommended by Hermogenes, Matthew next tells of the 'marvelous things' which occurred at Jesus birth. There are dreams (1:20; 2:12, 13, 19), astronomical phenomena (2:2, 10), angelic appearances (1:20) and even attending astrologers with wonderful gifts (2:1, 11). Quintilian also tells rhetorical students to note things that happened prior to the birth such as prophecies 'foretelling future greatness' (*Inst. Orat.* 3.7.10–18). Matthew provides these as well (1:23; 2:6).



Figure 8.11 Loaves and fishes from the mosaic floor of the ancient Church at Tabgha, near Capernaum. Photo Richard Rohrbaugh.

According to the *progymnasmata* of Menander Rhetor, one of the first things the writer of an encomium should do is praise the city from which the subject comes because honour is ascribed to those born in an honourable city (*Treatise* 2.369.17–370.10). To pull this one off, however, Matthew had to resort to some deft literary gymnastics. When he quotes the prophet Micah regarding Bethlehem, he turns Micah’s meaning around completely. Micah had called Bethlehem ‘one of the little clans of Judah’ (5:1). In Matthew that becomes:

And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the *rulers* of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will govern my people Israel (2:6).¹⁴

In this way Matthew tells of a Jesus who comes from a royal city, has royal ancestors and is to be a ruler of Israel. For the Jesus who started as a village artisan in Mark, the entire social spectrum has been traversed.

Whether Matthew was acquainted with the instructions of the *progymnasmata* may be debated, but the impact of this strategy among those literate in Greek is beyond question. The retainer class especially was quick to take note of stories about royalty precisely because they were dependent upon this group for their place in the system. With stories of a royal Jesus, therefore, Matthew displays yet another classic example of linguistic convergence with a particular audience.

Luke

Our argument thus far has been that Matthew's social interaction with his audience made an honorific Jesus necessary. When we come to the Gospel of Luke, we are not surprised to see this same strategy at work.¹⁵ In the birth narrative Luke also moves Jesus up the social scale by means of an honorific genealogy, though here the claims are even more exaggerated.¹⁶ To Luke, Jesus is not simply son of Abraham, son of David, he is son of God.

Yet in thinking about Luke's attempt to develop a persuasive argument, we shall not repeat the focus on ascribed honour. A different illustration is valuable in order to understand the broader issue of how gospel writers used rhetorical strategies which depend upon an understanding of the social system shared with readers. So this time let us address Luke's claims about Jesus' *acquired* honour.

In order to do this we shall begin with comments on Luke's preface (1:1–4) precisely because it tells us so much about the location of Luke himself. If we know Luke's place we can then answer the question about whether he is writing 'up' or 'down' to his particular audience. We will also be able to tell in what way the social location of the Jesus in his story would or would not be convincing.

A preface was a formal literary convention in antiquity, though Luke's preface is unique in the New Testament. In it he tells us about his decision to write, the reasons for it, and what he hopes to accomplish. Most importantly, he addresses the writing to an individual named Theophilus.

Such a beginning virtually begs comparison with other Greek writings of the time, and indeed recent research by Loveday Alexander has done just that. She has demonstrated a striking similarity between Luke's beginning and those of what she calls the 'technical writers' of the period. These were writers who composed works intended to be factually informative (1986, 1993). Their writing is 'literate, but not literary'. It is not the classic prose of the literati, but neither is it the vernacular Koine of the papyri. It is 'middlebrow' writing ('Zwischenprosa'); that is, the work of someone who is not among the elite, but perhaps writes for them (Alexander 1993: 61).

Such writing typically comes from 'slaves or freedmen in great households, Greeks in Roman society, men obliged to support themselves by the exercise of their profession' (Alexander 1986: 70). Unlike the literati, writers at this level do not evidence the typical elite Greek disdain for those who work with their hands, hence Alexander notes that Luke mentions Paul's tent-making 'in a totally matter-of-fact fashion in Acts 18:13' (1986: 70). Such writers in fact were very much like what Wayne Meeks calls the 'typical' urban Christian: a variety of free artisans and small traders (1982: 270; 1983: ch. 2). In the terms we have been using, such persons were located in the lower echelons of the retainer class and the upper levels of the urban non-elite.

Especially important in the preface is the fact that Luke addresses his Gospel to 'most excellent' Theophilus. Such addresses are common in literature produced for elite patrons. Josephus, for example, addresses his efforts to his patron, 'most excellent' Epaphroditus (preface to *JA* 1.8; *Life* 430; *Against Apion* 1.1). Yet Josephus himself was hardly among the elite. Yavetz locates him low in the royal entourage,

‘in the same category as doctors, magicians, philosophers and buffoons’ (1975: 432). Alexander places him at this same location (1986: 50). Both Josephus and Luke are thus writing for someone above them.¹⁷

Vernon Robbins has also characterized Luke as someone who is writing ‘up’ (1991: 323). That is, he writes as if to someone who is above him rather than in a position of equality (1991: 321). In fact, he addresses his patron the same way subordinates address superiors elsewhere in the book of Acts (23:26; 24:2, 24). The preface, therefore, tells us much about Luke’s own social location and perhaps also about the social dynamics between author and addressee. The audience of Luke is perhaps the urban elite of which Theophilus would be typical.¹⁸ The author himself is at neither end of the social spectrum. He is not among those who ‘disdain the artisan class’, but neither does he think like ‘the daily workers in the mines, fields, vineyards, or hillside grazing sheep and goats’ (Robbins 1991: 320). Thus Luke may well have been a lower level retainer, perhaps even a slave or freedman in a great house, who wrote a factual account for a patron above him.

If this is correct, we are in a position to ask: What does Luke do to make Jesus compelling to readers like Theophilus? How does he go about trying to create linguistic convergence? You will recall our comment earlier that honour claims had to be publicly acknowledged or the claimant had indeed played the fool. Thus when Luke offers a highly honorific genealogy for Jesus he has made an honour claim which begged public recognition. That would be especially true for an audience like Theophilus because people in his position paid attention only to publicly acknowledged honorific persons.

It is at this point that Luke offers the reader repeated assurances that Jesus is gaining the necessary public recognition. Acquired honour accrues to Jesus throughout the story. It also turns out to be a key element in Luke’s persuasive strategy. No doubt the frequency with which Luke reports public acknowledgement of Jesus’ honour seems unnecessary to modern readers, who usually pass over such notices without a second glance. But these reports would have been the vitally important public confirmation ancient readers expected.

The number of times Luke reports public praise of Jesus is truly amazing.¹⁹ Simeon praises the child in the temple (2:25–35). Anna does the same to all who will listen (2:38). His parents are amazed at his understanding (2:47). Luke tells us he increased in (divine and) human favour (2:52). John the Baptist publicly places Jesus higher than himself on the honour scale (3:16). A divine voice praises him and acknowledges his genealogy (3:22). The gossip network spreads his fame in the surrounding country and he is praised by everyone (4:14–15). All are amazed at him in the synagogue of Nazareth (4:22). In Capernaum they are astounded at his teaching (4:32) and his power over demons (4:36). Reports of him reach every place in the region (4:37). Word of his healing spreads abroad (5:15). He amazes onlookers by healing a paralytic and everyone is filled with awe (5:26). His reputation even reaches a high-ranking Roman officer (7:3). After raising the son of the widow of Nain, Jesus is praised as a prophet (7:16), and his fame spreads throughout the region (7:17).

In 7:18 the reputation of Jesus reaches John the Baptist who sends disciples to inquire. They are asked to report what they have seen and heard (7:22). After Jesus



Figure 8.12 A Roman milestone on the Via Maris (Road to the Sea), one branch of which ran from Capernaum south through Tiberias to the Plain of Esdraelon, then west to the Mediterranean. Photo Richard Rohrbaugh.

forgives a woman of the city, those at the table with him are taken aback by what they have witnessed (7:49). His disciples acknowledge that he commands even the wind and water (8:25). When Jesus heals a demoniac in the country of the Gerasenes, the swineherds tell everyone and the report spreads fear in the area (8:37). Jairus, a member of the elite, falls at Jesus' feet (a gesture of inferiority) to beg for his daughter's life. When she is healed he is 'astounded' (8:56).

Luke reports that the reputation of Jesus even reaches the royal court (9:9). The crowds near Bethsaida also hear of him (9:11). Divine approval in the hearing of his disciples is again given to Jesus on the mountain (9:35). A great crowd is astounded at the healing of an epileptic boy, and indeed at everything he was doing (9:43). In 10:17 even demons submit to his name (honour, reputation). Later, when Jesus is casting a demon out of a mute person, the crowd is again amazed (11:14), though opponents look for an alternative explanation for what is happening (11:15). In 11:27 a woman publicly praises Jesus' mother (hence Jesus by implication) by calling her 'honoured'.

Luke's hyperbole in 12:1 ('thousands', 'trampled one another') implies a growing reputation as well. Later in 13:17 we are told that Jesus' enemies have been 'put to shame' while the entire crowd rejoices at what he does. 'All' the people praise him when he heals a beggar in 18:43. When Jesus rides into Jerusalem to the praise of the disciples, Pharisees ask Jesus to quiet them. But Jesus replies that even the stones would cry out if the crowd did not (19:40). Later, when he teaches in the temple, we are told that the people were 'spellbound' by what they heard (19:48). Having decisively confounded those who publicly challenge him over payment of taxes, the narrator reports that even his opponents were amazed (20:26). And finally, in 21:38 we are told that people will even get up early in the morning just to listen to him in the temple.



Figure 8.13 Later synagogue at Capernaum, built over an earlier structure Jesus may have frequented (Luke 4:31–7). Photo Richard Rohrbaugh.

Given the fact that all of these notices are *constructed by the narrator*, it is safe to say that concern for acquired honour, for *public* reputation, is critical to Luke's rhetorical strategy (of the 37 examples cited above, Luke has added 22 to Mark's story). Would a modern writer write this way? Unlikely. Would an ancient Mediterranean writer? Yes, indeed, if writing 'up' – that is, if writing for someone above himself in the social order, someone he knows will view *public* reputation as the justification for any claims the story makes.

Once again, therefore, we have seen a gospel writer relocate Jesus in order to make him palatable to the intended audience. By stressing the acquired honour of Jesus, Luke makes him worthy of Theophilus' attention. The social location of Jesus has once again been used as a strategy to create linguistic convergence.

John

When we come to the Gospel of John we enter a different world. That is true not only in terms of the Gospel's content, but also in terms of its social location and rhetorical strategy. It does not emerge from the rural peasant world in the same way Mark does. Nor is it from the sophisticated urban worlds of Matthew and Luke. Its Jesus displays neither special identification with the poor nor the high level of honour worthy of elite urban readers. Something else drives John's unique portrait of Jesus.

John is almost certainly a Galilean gospel recounting the Jesus story for a mixed



Figure 8.14 Jacob's well, at a shrine near Shechem commemorating Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4. Photo Richard Rohrbaugh.

(Galilean, Samaritan, Gentile) community of Jesus' followers. Moreover, this community was likely what sociolinguist M. A. K. Halliday calls an 'anti-society'; that is, a group which exists within a dominant society but as a conscious alternative to it (Halliday 1976: 570).²⁰ It was an alienated group which had been pushed (or withdrawn) to the social margins where it stood as a protest to the values of the larger society (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998).

The scope and depth of this alienation is evident in the language of the Gospel itself. John's Jesus says to his disciples, 'If the world [the dominant society] hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world – therefore the world hates you' (15:18–19; the same sentiment is repeated in the later correspondence in the community in 1 John 3:13). Later Jesus repeats the sentiment. The disciples, he says, 'do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world' (17:14; repeated in 17:16). They are in the world, but offer it no loyalty or love. 'In the world you will face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!' (16:33).

This is tough talk. Yet it accurately conveys the temper of the group's relations with outsiders. As the story makes clear, the hostility of the group was especially aimed at Judaeans. The Johannine group saw the larger Judaeon society as hostile to

In most English translations of John's Gospel we consistently encounter the unfortunate and incorrect translation 'Jews' (Greek: *Ioudaioi*). Contemporary meanings ascribed to the word 'Jew' come from much later medieval and even twentieth-century usage. Such modern connotations of 'Jew' or 'Jewishness' are absent from John's Gospel, hence it is simply inappropriate to project them into the text via faulty translation.

In John the Greek word *Ioudaios* means simply and only 'Judaean'. Judaea is precisely a place – with its environs, air and water. 'Judaean' thus designates a person from one segment of a larger ethnic group, 'Israel' (John 1:47, 49), who comes from the place after which the segment is named, 'Judaea' (*Ioudaia*). The correlatives of 'Judaean' in John are 'Galilean' and 'Peraean', and together they make up Israel. The opposite of Israel is non-Israel, the nations other than Israel, or simply, 'the nations'.

The term *Ioudaios* (Judaean) appears 70 times in John. It is used only five times in Matthew, six times in Mark and five times in Luke. This striking contrast between John and the Synoptics makes understanding the term critically important.

Figure 8.15 Jews/Judaean

Jesus and therefore hostile to themselves. John's Jesus calls Judaeans children of the devil (8:44), and they respond by claiming he is either a Samaritan or possessed by demons (8:48). Obviously this is a group whose relations with the dominant society have gone sour.

It is in the midst of this social conflict that John locates Jesus. Like the Johannine community, Jesus is hated by the dominant society. Like Mark, John defends Jesus vigorously (attacking his opponents with equal vigour). But in doing so he makes a claim quite unlike anything in the synoptics. There is no attempt here to locate Jesus next to the rural poor. Nor is there a move to push him up the scale of honour. Unashamedly, almost defiantly, John admits that Jesus is nothing.

The key issue in John is where Jesus is 'from'. We have already seen the importance of birth/origin because it determined honour, stature, public legitimacy and authority. In the instructions of the *progynasmata* (see p. 213) we were told to pay great attention to birthplace because great people are born in great places. Obviously obscure Galilean villages like Nazareth would not qualify (John has no Bethlehem tradition). As Nathanael puts it, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' (1:46; see also 7:52). Jesus cannot be counted as honorific on the basis of origin.

John is aware of this. In John 7, while Jesus is at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, in the midst of a tense and potentially dangerous situation, a dispute arises in the crowd about whether Jesus might be the Messiah. Then someone in the crowd shouts, 'We know where this man is *from* . . .' Implication: he comes from a place of no account, hence could not be the Messiah. Another speaker puts it squarely: 'Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee does he?' A third speaker

reminds everyone that the Scripture foretells a Messiah from Bethlehem, from the house of David the king. The result is chaos and a near arrest.

It is right in the midst of all this that John's Jesus *openly* admits that his origin qualifies him for nothing. 'You know me, and you know where I am *from*' (7:28). But he then makes one of the central claims in all of the Gospel of John: 'I have not come on my own . . . but the one who sent me is true.' Granted Jesus' biological origins are nothing, but in John's eyes they are irrelevant because Jesus does not come in his own name.

Note that 43 times in John we are told that Jesus was 'sent' by God. This is language that appears only twice in Matthew (10:40, 15:24), once in Mark (9:37), four times in Luke (4:18, 43; 9:48; 10:16) and once in Paul (Rom. 8:3). But for John this assertion that Jesus has been sent by someone higher (God) is the entire basis for his claim on people's attention. Jesus' place of origin is irrelevant because *he claims absolutely nothing on his own*. The relevant authority is the one who sent him.

The importance of this language about being 'sent' can be seen in another way. In antiquity the 'sent' messenger was one who came from a patron, a person of unquestioned stature and authority. As broker, the messenger's only claim to fame was access to the patron, nothing more. He simply acted as an intermediary between the patron and those for whom the patron's message or largesse was intended. This



Figure 8.16 Excavation at the Pool of Bethzatha. Jesus healed a man who had been there for 38 years (John 5:2–18). Photo Richard Rohrbaugh.

broker role is the one Jesus plays throughout John's Gospel. Note that eight times we are reminded that Jesus will return to his patron, (7:33; 13:1; 14:12, 28; 16:5, 10, 17, 28), suggesting that the broker has ready access to and from the patron who sent him.

Readers of John's Gospel will not find it difficult to sense a certain defensive tone about all this. The sheer repetition of the claim that Jesus was 'sent' is part of it. But so also are statements like, 'The Father who has sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent' (5:37–8). Later Jesus prays that 'the world may know that you have sent me' (17:23). Our argument is thus that John's claim that Jesus is 'sent' from God is intended as a defensive strategy meant to counteract the prevailing wisdom that one 'from' Nazareth could claim no public standing on his own. John agrees that Jesus has no standing, but he claims that as broker for God Jesus bears the authority of his patron.

One additional charge asserted by Jesus' Judean enemies may be added to all this. The typical instructions in the *progymnasmata* (see p. 213) remind a writer that after matters of origin and birth, the next conventional topic to be addressed when praising someone is the matter of nurture:

Next comes 'nurture.' Was he reared in a palace? Were his swaddling clothes robes of purple? Was he from his first growth brought up in the lap of royalty? Or, instead, was he raised up to be emperor as a young man by some felicitous chance? If he does not have any distinguished nurture (as Achilles had with Chiron), discuss his education, observing here: 'In addition to what has been said, I wish to describe the quality of his mind.' Then you must speak of his love of learning, his quickness, his enthusiasm for study, his easy grasp of what is taught him. If he excels in literature, philosophy, and knowledge of letters, you must praise this.

(Menander Rhetor, *Treatise* 2. 371.17–372.2)

John's Jesus would not qualify on this score either. In 7:15, in the midst of the heated dispute in the temple, an early challenge is raised by someone in the crowd: 'How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?' Jesus had neither the proper origin nor the proper nurture/education. But once again Jesus' reply is typical of the strategy throughout the Gospel of John: 'My teaching is not mine but his who sent me' (7:16). It is as if the writer knows he can make no claims for Jesus that will stand up before either his Judean opponents or potential readers of the account. His recourse is thus to claim that Jesus was sent by God, speaks for God, speaks the words of God and makes no claim of his own for either his origin or his teaching.

In sum, unlike Mark who simply recognizes Jesus as a rural peasant similar to his own audience, or Matthew and Luke who feel it necessary to move Jesus up the scale of honour to appeal to elite audiences, John's strategy is unique. He makes no claim for Jesus whatsoever. Everything ultimately comes from God; Jesus is simply the broker whom God has sent to speak on his behalf.

LATER CORRESPONDENCE IN THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY

Before we leave the Johannine community it is worth taking note of one additional feature of its language which will help us move beyond the Gospel and into the letters of 1, 2 and 3 John. Introversionist or anti-societal groups tend to produce language designed to foster close personal relationships among group insiders.²¹ They do so as a means of reinforcing group solidarity in the face of hostility from the outside. It is thus no accident that the Gospel of John is filled with *dialogues*: the language of close, personal interaction. In other words, the many conversations of Jesus in John's Gospel are being used as part of his accommodation strategy. They help sustain close personal relations within the Johannine community itself.

This concern for close, personal relationships with Jesus and each other comes through clearly in Jesus' great prayer for his disciples: 'I ask . . . that they may all be one. As you, father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us' (17:20–1). It is also what makes the later correspondence in the Johannine community so fascinating. As fractures began to develop within the group, concern for group solidarity became increasingly intense. Readers of 1 John are reminded of the message they had heard from the beginning: 'that you should love one another' (3:11), and that 'he who loves God must love his brother also' (4:21). Those who break fellowship are excoriated in the most severe terms. 'Any one who hates a brother is a murderer.' 'If anyone says, "I love God", and hates his brother, he is a liar' (1 John 4:20; cf. John 17:21–3). The refusal of Diotrephes to receive group members and maintain group solidarity becomes especially painful (3 John 9–10).

The peculiar language of the Johannine community, then, with its concern for close personal relationships and group loyalty, together with its portrait of Jesus as the one the dominant society hated before it hated group members, all bespeak a social location of marginalization. From that precarious position no attempt is made to finesse the lowly status of Jesus' origin or nurture. Jesus is nothing on his own. God is the source of all and God's honour is unassailable. Jesus has been 'sent' as God's broker and those who love him must follow him and stick together. That is not only the content of John's message, it is the character of his social interaction with his audience.

CONCLUSION

We started with the notion that language is a form of social interaction. It derives its meaning from a shared social system. We also argued that writers and speakers tend to accommodate language to their audiences in order to attain a specific social goal. They seek linguistic convergence that will gain a sympathetic hearing. Even the brief illustrations we have chosen demonstrate that to be true of the canonical Gospels.

Mark accommodates his Jesus to the rural, village audience for which he writes. His Jesus story is a story in which the readers hear about themselves. Matthew and Luke accommodate their versions of the story to the urban elite. Among the many

strategies they use (there are a number of others in addition to the ones we have chosen to illustrate here) is the attempt to move Jesus up the social ladder, to give him the honour status that would command attention from elite readers. John, by contrast, openly admits Jesus' lowly status and claims that any authority he has is derived from the one who sent him. Moreover, he uses the Jesus story to create and hold together the precarious personal relationships which always characterize anti-societal groups.

Each of these is a strategy to persuade. Each is an attempt at linguistic convergence. While additional rhetorical devices or persuasive strategies exist in each Gospel, those we have chosen to illustrate are among the most important precisely because their persuasive power derives from one of the great realities of ancient social life: status stratification. Moreover, it should be clear to modern readers that for people like us seeing these strategies at work is totally dependent on learning our way into the shared social system of antiquity.

NOTES

- 1 Rhetorical studies are numerous. For background on classical rhetoric, see Kennedy (1972, 1994). For its application to New Testament study see Kennedy (1984). Among those who have compared ancient instruction on persuasive speaking with materials in the New Testament, see: Betz (1972, 1975, 1979), Church (1978), Jewett (1982), Wuellner (1979). For an attempt to see the story of Jesus in light of ancient aretologies, see Georgi (1972). On the much debated question of genre of the gospels, see Talbert (1977), Shuler (1982), Tolbert (1989), Burridge (1992). For a fine and detailed comparison of pronouncement stories and elaborated *chreia*, see Mack and Robbins (1989).
- 2 For a discussion of this in relation to the Gospel of John, see Malina (1994).
- 3 We thus intend to concentrate on what we might call a writer's 'rhetorical strategy'. By this we mean the social impact a text is designed to have upon its readers. As John Elliott has put it, 'I prefer the term "strategy" rather than "purpose" or "intention" because, as in the strategy of a game plan or the tactics of military warfare, strategy implies not simply the communication of ideas but the deliberate design of a document calculated to have a specific social effect on its intended hearers or readers. Sociological exegesis thus seeks to discover the manner in which a given document has been designed as a response to a given situation, and how it has been composed to elicit a social response on the part of its audience' (1990: 10–11).
- 4 A complete discussion of the concept and its usefulness to New Testament scholars can be found in my article on the topic (Rohrbaugh 1987). For its application to the Gospel of Mark, see Rohrbaugh (1993). The comments below are in large part a summary of that article.
- 5 There are many studies of social stratification in the agrarian societies of antiquity. Among the best are MacMullen (1974), Ste. Croix (1980), Lenski (1984) and Stavenhagen (1975). On the anachronistic, but so-called scholarly 'consensus' that early Christians were middle class, see Rohrbaugh (1984). For the application of the issues involved to New Testament study see Fiensy (1991), Oakman (1986) and Hanson and Oakman (1998).
- 6 Those arguing for this *Sitz im Leben* include Kee, Myers, Waetjen, Koester, Luhrmann,

Theissen, *et al.* For the most recent and thorough case for this location see the forthcoming Anchor Bible Commentary on the Gospel of Mark by Joel Marcus.

- 7 As in most agrarian societies, between 1 and 3% of the population owned a near majority of the arable land. David Fiensy (1991) reports evidence of aristocratic estates varying from 50–2,500 acres. By contrast he estimates the average peasant plot at 6 acres or less.
- 8 A review of the many recent studies on this matter, together with a full discussion of the Matthean community as a scribal brotherhood marginalized by those of their own social status, is offered by Duling (1995: 159–81).
- 9 In fact, one half of the references to the city (*polis*) in the New Testament are in Luke and Acts. Matthew has the Galilean ministry in the cities (9:1; 10:5, 11, 15, 23; 11:1, 20). See Overman (1990) and Rohrbaugh (1991).
- 10 Plutarch makes a modest attempt at exploring the semantic field of honour by commenting on Greek equivalents for the Latin term *honor*. He suggests *doxa* and *timê* as appropriate substitutes for his Greek readers (*Moralia* IV, 266). For a much more substantial semantic field see Malina and Neyrey (1991: 46).
- 11 This was even true in respect to God: 'God's honour is set at naught by those who deify the mortal with honour that belongs to the imperishable' (Philo, *Ebr.* 110).
- 12 Whether Jesus was literate has been a matter of some debate. He is depicted as reading only in Luke (4:16), though that is likely a projection of Luke's own world onto Jesus. See Bar-Ilan (1992) contra the wildly overstated views of Shmuel Safrai (1976; also: Josephus *Against Apion* 2.204, *Jewish Antiquities* 4.211, Philo, *Ad Gaium* 115, 210). For a review of the literature in the debate see Yaghjian (1996). Harris (1989) provides a comprehensive discussion of ancient literacy. As he makes clear, the probability that a village artisan in this period was literate is near zero.
- 13 A number of the chapters in Balch (1991) also deal with this matter at length.
- 14 Brown (1977: 184–7) provides a full discussion of the Matthew quotation. It matches neither the Hebrew (MT) for the Greek (LXX) texts, both of which are making a point about the insignificance of Bethlehem. The few attempts to argue for textual variants rather than deliberate change are somewhat tortured and not widely accepted. What none of the discussions of this quotation to date have recognized is the *social* significance of the Matthean changes.
- 15 It is interesting that Luke follows exactly the same strategy with Paul in the book of Acts (see Neyrey 1996). For comment on what is more likely the actual historical status of Paul, see Stegemann (1987).
- 16 For a full discussion of this strategy in the opening chapters of Luke, see Rohrbaugh (1995).
- 17 In addition to Alexander (1986, 1983), discussions of Theophilus as Luke's patron can be found in Mason (1992) and Robbins (1991).
- 18 Many scholars have argued this location for the audience of Luke. See Braun (1995), Robbins (1991), Downing (1982), Kany (1986) and Rohrbaugh (1991). As far back as 1927 H. J. Cadbury argued that the Gospel of Luke represented an urban point of view.
- 19 For additional comment on the scope and function of gossip networks in honour–shame societies can be found in Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998: 103–4).
- 20 For an extensive treatment of the Gospel of John as anti-language, see Petersen (1993). Unfortunately Petersen treats anti-language as a largely literary phenomenon, leaving unacknowledged the relationship between anti-language and anti-society.
- 21 For a discussion of the Johannine group as an introversionist sect, see Esler (1994: 70–91).

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CHRISTIANITY IN THE SECOND AND THIRD CENTURIES



Jeffrey S. Siker

INTRODUCTION

Christianity in the second and third centuries CE has traditionally been studied less than either the origins of Christianity in the first century or the patristic era of Christianity that reached its zenith in the fourth and fifth centuries. Indeed, the second and third centuries of Christianity are often referred to as ‘post’ and ‘pre’. This time period is termed ‘post-apostolic’ or ‘post-New Testament’ since it comes after the formative period of first-century Christianity, after the first generation of Christians had died, after most of what were to become the New Testament writings had been written. But second- and third-century Christianity is also termed ‘pre-Constantinian’ or ‘ante-Nicene’ since it comes before the rise of the emperor Constantine the Great to power in 306 CE and with him the beginnings of a state-promoted Christendom. It is referred to as ‘ante-Nicene’ because it comes before the first council of Nicaea in 325 CE, which was important in setting the course for the church thereafter.

But the second and third centuries are far more than just a muddle between the origins of Christianity in the first century and the maturing of Christianity into an imperially supported religion with developed credal statements in the fourth century and beyond. Indeed, the developments of Christianity in the second and third centuries are of great significance in their own right, and should not be seen in any way as a series of blips between the times of Jesus and the apostles on one side and the time of Constantine and Eusebius, the most eminent early historian (c. 263 – c. 339/340 CE), on the other. In part the importance of this time period can be seen from the number of other chapters in this volume that touch directly on important developments in early Christianity that have to do principally with second- and third-century Christianity (see Chapters 20–2, 31–6, and 39–41).

One reason for the somewhat modest attention to Christianity in the second and third centuries has to do with the relative lack of primary sources for this period. In comparison with post-Nicene Christian writings, materials from the second and third centuries are less than abundant. For example, one widely used collection, the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (ANF, published 1885–96), includes most second- and third-century Christian writings in nine volumes. It includes the writings of the so-called

Apostolic Fathers, the Apologists (especially Justin Martyr), Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Hippolytus, Cyprian, and the New Testament Apocrypha, among other items. By contrast, the collection of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (published 1886–1900) takes 28 volumes, consisting primarily of Augustine, Jerome, and Chrysostom.¹

Another reason, perhaps, for the relative lack of attention to second- and third-century Christianity is because the developments in Christianity during this time are rather multidirectional and not easily mapped. Whereas the first century of Christianity, despite significant diversity, had a basic cohesion apparent in the Gospel writings or the movement of the Pauline churches, and the fourth and fifth centuries had the pressures of imperial and strong episcopal organizational and unifying structures, second and third century Christianity was immensely diverse in character, more so in many ways than what came before or what followed. There were many ebbs and flows that defy neat categorization as different forms of Christian expression emerged and changed, all shaping and contributing in dynamic ways to the complex character of the Christianities within Christianity of this era.

SEPARATION FROM JUDAISM

One significant factor that was forming Christianity in all its diversity already at the beginning of the second century was the steady increase in the number of gentile converts to the faith, combined with the steady decline in the Jewish identity of Christianity almost across the board. What had begun as a Messianic movement within first-century Judaism had by the beginning of the second century evolved into a largely gentile religious movement rooted in Jewish scriptures, but increasingly divorced from the Jewish people and their faith practices. If Christians in the first century could see themselves still within the larger framework of Judaism (as Paul and Matthew arguably could), Christians in the second century not only moved away from Judaism, but often did so in ways that sharply repudiated Judaism in even stronger terms than their predecessors had done. For reasons noted by David Horrell at the beginning of Chapter 6 in this volume, even the use of the designations ‘Jew’, ‘Jewish’ and ‘Christian’ in relation to first-century phenomena is regarded as inaccurate and anachronistic by some scholars.

Christians both claimed the ancient heritage of Judaism for themselves by virtue of the Jewish scriptures (and so appealed to Roman respect for antiquity) and yet characterized the Judaism of its day as an inferior and now forsaken religious tradition. Christians typically saw themselves as a new *genos*, a new race, quite apart from Judaism (see New Testament antecedents in 1 Pet. 2:9; 2 Cor. 3:6; 5:17; and Gal. 6:15). For example, the second-century *Apology* of Aristides of Athens argues that ‘there are four classes of men in this world: Barbarians and Greeks, Jews and Christians . . . The Jews trace the origin of their race from Abraham . . . The Christians, then, trace the beginning of their religion from Jesus the Messiah’ (ch. 2, *ANF* 9: 264–5, Syriac recension). While Jews traced the genealogical origin of their race to Abraham, Aristides traced the religious origin of the Christian ‘race’ to Christ. A similar assertion can be found in the first chapter of the *Epistle to Diognetus*, where

Christians are described as a *kainon genos*, a 'new race', and in the apocryphal second-century writing of the *Kerygma Petrou* (the 'Preaching of Peter'), which states that 'we are Christians, who as a third race worship him [God] in a new way' (Hennecke and Schneemelcher 1990–2: vol. 2, 100; Elliott 1993: 22).

Though a 'new race', Christians also saw themselves as the true spiritual heirs of the ancient promises made through Israel's scriptures. The foundations of these claims, of course, can be traced back to the earliest Christian writings, where the fulfilment of the prophecy motif permeates, for example, Matthew, Luke-Acts, and the letters of Paul. Although not all Christians of the second and third centuries appealed to the Jewish scriptures with the same vigour (for example, Ignatius of Antioch in the early second century makes very little use of scripture), a basic motif that runs throughout this period is the proof of Christian truth claims against Judaism by invoking prooftexts from the Jewish scriptures themselves. Such Christological readings of the 'Old Testament' became commonplace in the centuries to follow.

Towards the beginning of the second century, for example, the author of the *Epistle of Barnabas*, arguing against the Jewish practice of ritual circumcision, stated that true circumcision is the spiritual circumcision of the Christians and not the false physical circumcision of the Jews. To prove his point Barnabas appealed to the story of Abraham having his household circumcised from Genesis 17. According to Barnabas, Abraham 'did so looking forward in the spirit to Jesus, and had received the doctrines of the three letters'. The so-called 'doctrine of the three letters' refers to Barnabas' reading of a passage from the Septuagint version (Greek) of Gen. 17:23, which he cites: 'and Abraham circumcised from his household eighteen men and three hundred'. For Barnabas the significance of this passage rests in the number 318, which in Greek is represented by the three letters *TIH*. Barnabas proceeds:

What then was the knowledge that was given to him? Notice that he first mentions the eighteen, and after a pause the three hundred. The eighteen is I (= 10) and H (= 8) – you have Jesus [*IHSOUS*] – and because the cross was destined to have grace in the *T* [300 in Greek] he says 'and three hundred'. So he indicates Jesus in the two letters and the cross in the other. He knows this who placed the gift of teaching in our hearts. No one has heard a more excellent lesson from me, but I know that you are worthy.

(Barnabas 9:7–9)

Such examples of early Christians finding Jesus present in the text of the Jewish scriptures are manifold. In the second century no one was more exhaustive in this regard than Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, written sometime between 155–61 CE. Justin's *Dialogue* exemplifies the continuing presentation of Christianity as having superseded Judaism while at the same time claiming that Jewish scriptures first and foremost were Christian scriptures because they were understood as testifying to the advent and rejection of Christ among the Jews. In his discussion, for example, of the theophany to Abraham at Mamre found in Genesis 18, Justin argued that 'the Lord' who appeared to Abraham was Christ, accompanied by the two angels who went on to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (*Dial.* 56; see *Dial.* 119).

This kind of embrace of Jewish scripture while rejecting Judaism is commonplace in Christianity as it develops over the second and third centuries. Indeed, an entire *adversus Judaeos* literature develops during this time with stock features, accusing the Jews of rejecting Christ, which results in God's consequent rejection of the Jewish people (see the classic treatments by Williams 1935, Simon 1986 and Ruether 1979). There is a significant difference, however, between second- and third-century Christian theological attacks against Judaism and Christian polemics against Judaism represented in first-century Christian literature. Christianity at the end of the first century was just a generation removed from its historic Jewish-Christian roots, with a still sizeable – if shrinking – number of Christians coming from a Jewish heritage. The tensions at this point still appear to be at least to some degree intramural fights over Jewish law, especially from the perspective of Roman rulers (in Acts 18:15, for example, Gallio, the Roman governor of Achaia, is described as holding Paul had broken no law of Rome, merely to be in tension with Jewish law). But in the second and third centuries Christian attacks on Judaism were increasingly extramural and the polemic not so much the self-definition of an emerging Christianity from its Jewish roots, but more Christian vilification of Judaism and Jews as a religion and a people renounced by God. Direct social engagement between Christians and Jews became less commonplace, with Christian attacks against Judaism quickly becoming more rhetorical fencing to defend the truth of Christian faith than actual representations of Christian interaction with real Jews.

Towards the end of the second century we come upon the *Peri Pascha* (*Paschal Homily*) by the Christian apologist Melito of Sardis. In it Melito rehearses the history of Israel with special focus on the Exodus and the Passover tradition, all of which he interprets from a Christological perspective. Melito provides a good example of how Christians claimed the heritage of Israel with one hand, but with the other hand repudiated contemporary Judaism as rejected by God. Referring to Christ he writes: 'He is the Pascha [Passover] of our salvation. It is he who in many endured many things: it is he that was in Abel murdered, and in Isaac bound, and in Jacob exiled, and in Joseph sold, and in Moses exposed, and in the lamb slain, and in David persecuted, and in the prophets dishonoured' (*Peri Pascha* 69; Hall 1979: 37). As for the Jews, Melito condemns them for failing to recognize Jesus as the Christ (*Peri Pascha* 81–2; Hall 1979: 45). Indeed, according to Melito, the Jews repaid God's graciousness with ungrateful acts: 'evil for good and affliction for joy and death for life; in recompense for that you had to die' (*Peri Pascha* 90; Hall 1979: 51).

The pattern of Christian attacks on and denigration of Judaism continue in the writings of several authors from the Latin West from the end of the second century through the third century and beyond. In his *Against the Jews* Tertullian claimed that the Jews were idolaters who had been justly punished by God for denying the clear references in the prophetic writings to the advent of Christ. Novatian wrote a trilogy against different aspects of Jewish life and worship: *On Circumcision*, *On the Sabbath*, and *On Jewish Foods* (so Jerome, *de Viris Illustribus* ['On Illustrious Men'] 70). A sermon from c. 260 CE falsely ascribed to the third-century North African bishop Cyprian, *Against the Jews*, repeats the by now standard accusations against the Jews, and appears to borrow heavily in Latin translation upon Melito's homily *Peri Pascha*. And a fragment of a homily attributed to the early third-century theologian

Hippolytus, *Against the Jews*, blames the Jews for their transgressions against God: 'Why was the temple made desolate? . . . it was because they killed the Son of their Benefactor' (*Against the Jews* 7; ANF 5: 220). It must be said that in most cases these writings were not addressed to Jews at all, but were written to convince pagans of the superiority of Christianity to Judaism. The Jews here served more as straw opponents for Christian apologetics than as real disputants.

Even though Christian polemic against Judaism was commonplace in the second and third centuries, there were still groups of Christians who identified with Judaism and Jewish practices to greater and lesser degrees. In his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* Justin is asked by Trypho if someone who confesses Jesus to be the Christ will be saved if that person also observes the Jewish law. Justin responds: 'I say such a man will be saved, unless he exerts every effort to influence other men to practise the same rites as himself, informing them that they cannot be saved unless they do so' (*Dial.* 47). Justin goes on to say that some Christians refuse to have fellowship with such 'Judaizing' Christians, but he disagrees and argues that Christians should associate with other Christians, even if they follow Jewish law.

The most significant example of Jewish Christianity in the second century was a group known as the Ebionites. We first hear of the Ebionites from the late second-century Christian heresiologist Irenaeus in his *Against Heresies*, where he would seem to dispute Justin's approach to the question of relating to Jewish Christians. Irenaeus writes: 'Those who are called Ebionites . . . use only the Gospel according to Matthew and reject the apostle Paul, whom they call an apostate from the law. . . . They practice circumcision and persevere in legal customs and the Jewish way of life' (1.26.2; Grant 1997: 95; see Schoeps 1969 and Daniélou 1964). Irenaeus also states that, like the Cerinthians and Carpocratians, the Ebionites denied that Jesus was born of a virgin, and they argued that at his baptism Christ descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove, departing from him just before he died. In this view Jesus was a great prophet, but not the divine Son of God worshipped by Christians.

Another Jewish-Christian group from the second century, the Elchasites, apparently had gnostic leanings. In his early third-century work, *Refutation of All Heresies* (also called the *Philosophumena*), the Christian heresiologist Hippolytus criticized the Elchasites for teaching that 'believers ought to be circumcised and live according to the Law' and for their belief that Christ was not born of a virgin (9.9.1; ANF 5: 132). The founder of the group, Elchasai (variously spelled), claimed to have received a revelation from a 96-mile-high angel whom he identified as the Son of God (9.8.1; ANF 5: 132). According to Elchasai, Christ was born a man, not of a virgin. Further, Christ had been born before and would continue to be reborn into the world from time to time, having transferred his soul from body to body. This mixture of soul migration and Jewish law observance was not widespread in early Christianity, but it does show something of the diversity of Christian attitudes towards Jewish practices and the strong responses against such observances that various Christian leaders such as Irenaeus and Hippolytus (and later Tertullian and Epiphanius) felt obliged to register.

SCRIPTURE, CANON, AND AUTHORITY

While Christians certainly took over the Jewish scriptures as their own (see e.g., 1 Tim. 3:16), at least in their Septuagint form, Christians in the second and third century were also busy crafting a new canon, a new collection of authoritative writings (Gamble 1985; McDonald 1995; Metzger 1987). Towards the end of the first century the voices of the apostles had started to die out, and a strong interest developed in preserving the story of Jesus as testified by the apostles and their immediate followers (so Luke 1:1–4). At times this process of forming a new Christian canon involved conscious deliberation, but more often than not we find Christians reflecting in retrospect on writings that had emerged as authoritative in various Christian communities. The earliest evidence of a collection of authoritative Christian writings comes from the second-century work that later became part of the 'New Testament' itself: 2 Peter. In 2 Pet. 3:15–17 the author (certainly not Peter) writes about a collection of Paul's letters. (Whether the collection 2 Peter knew is the same as ours is unknown.) The author of 2 Peter states:

Regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. You therefore, beloved, since you are forewarned, beware that you are not carried away with the error of the lawless and lose your own stability.

Instructive here is the acknowledgement of Paul's letters as 'scripture', which suggests that by the time 2 Peter wrote, probably sometime in the first half of the second century, the letters of Paul had taken on significant authority. And yet their authority was not without problems. Indeed, one almost gets the sense that 2 Peter would have been just as happy had Paul's difficult and hard to understand letters not survived to gain the authority they did. We also learn from this passage of rival groups of Christians ('the ignorant and unstable') who used the authority of Paul's writings to advocate a rather different understanding of Christian faith and practice than that espoused by 2 Peter.

The Pauline heritage was embraced by various groups in second-century Christianity. The apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, for example, presents an image of Paul extolling an ascetic life and radically challenging traditional Graeco-Roman household codes. By contrast the Pastoral Epistles (1, 2 Timothy and Titus – widely acknowledged as deutero-Pauline writings from the end of the first or beginning of the second century), endorse these same traditional household codes and encourage women to marry, have children, and manage their homes in a traditional manner (1 Timothy 2, 5; see MacDonald 1983).

The battle for Paul in the memory, canon, and practice of the churches was nowhere more significant than in relation to Marcion. Marcion was a Christian, originally from Asia Minor, who became influential in the church at Rome in the 140s CE. What we know of Marcion comes principally from the several second- and third-century Christian authors who wrote so strongly against him, especially

Tertullian, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus (see, e.g., Tertullian, *Against Marcion*; Justin, *Apology* 26, 58; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.27; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 3.3; Origen, *Against Celsus* 5.54; 6.53, 74; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, hereafter *HE*, 4.9; 5.13). In short, Marcion was convinced that the good and loving God revealed in Jesus Christ was different from the vindictive God of the Jews who created and rules this world. The inferior God of the Jews, to whom Jewish scriptures testify, is a jealous and vengeful God who requires sacrifices, commands the slaughter of entire peoples, and is inconsistent. Marcion argued that the loving God of Jesus is essentially antithetical to the God of the Jewish scriptures. Indeed, he wrote a book entitled *Antitheses* in which he listed what he saw as various contradictions between the Jewish scriptures and Christian writings. Marcion thus rejected the Jewish scriptures as having no authority whatsoever, since they were the ramblings of a lesser God than the Father of Jesus.

In Marcion's view the earliest Jewish Christians had misunderstood what Jesus had intended; they failed to see the radical break with Jewish tradition and scripture that Jesus inaugurated. Marcion saw himself as the one who would restore the original intentions of Jesus and his most important follower, Paul. This restoration included purging the earliest Christian writings of the corruptions that earlier misinformed Christians had introduced into them. Specifically, this meant that Marcion produced an edited, expurgated version of Luke's Gospel and of Paul's letters. Since earlier Christians had wrongly corrupted these writings with references to the Jewish scriptures, Marcion felt it was his enlightened duty literally to cut such references out of the text. In this endeavour Marcion saw himself aligned with Paul in his fight against 'Judaizing' Christians. Paul was Marcion's hero, and yet in Marcion's view even Paul's letters had been corrupted by Judaizing interpolations. Marcion thus rendered the first collection of 'New Testament' writings into his own version of the Christian canon: ten of Paul's letters (not including the Pastoral Epistles) and the Gospel of Luke, which Marcion thought Paul had also originally written in an earlier form. Marcion gained a following at Rome and was expelled by the church there in 144 CE. He appears to have died around 160 CE, though Marcionite churches sprang up in various places and endured for several centuries (see von Harnack 1924; Hoffmann 1984).

By the end of the second century the four canonical gospels had gained authoritative stature. In the middle of the century Justin Martyr made many allusions to the Gospels and referred to them as the 'Memoirs of the Apostles' (*Dial.* 100, 104–5). Around 160 CE Justin's student, Tatian, compiled a harmony of the four gospels, the *Diatessaron*, which circulated widely in Eastern Christianity among Syriac-speaking churches. The *Diatessaron* was the standard text of the Gospels for these churches down through the fifth century, when it finally gave way to the four separate Gospels. The fourfold character of the Gospels provided Irenaeus the opportunity to reflect on the number of the Gospels. He wrote:

It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are, since there are four directions of the world in which we are, and four principal winds . . . The four living creatures (of Rev. 4:9) symbolize the four

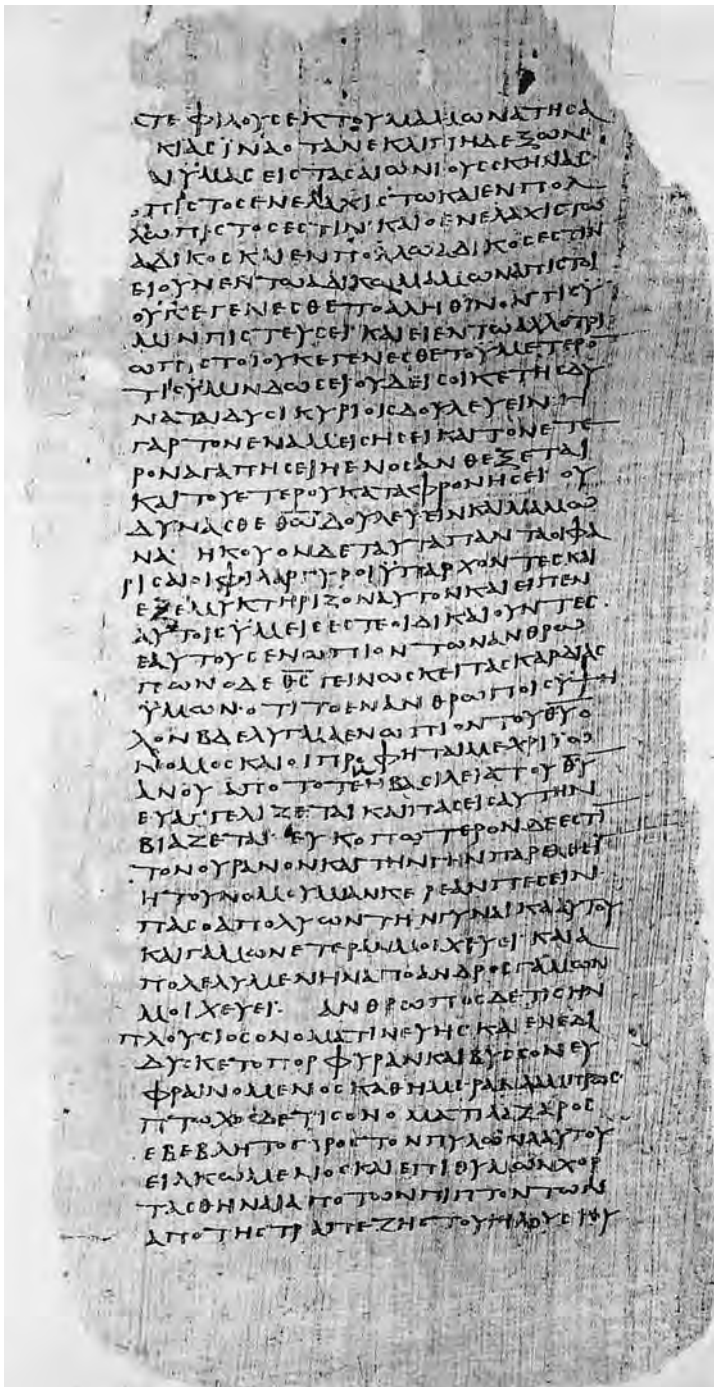


Figure 9.1 Luke 16:9-21 from a Greek manuscript from the early third century CE. With the permission of Fondation Martin Bodmer.

Gospels . . . and there were four principal covenants made with humanity, through Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Christ.

(*Against Heresies* 3.11.8; see Metzger 1987: 154–5)

It is worth noting that Irenaeus defended the fourfold character of the Gospel collection in his treatise against heresies, and especially against gnostic Christians, for whom other gospels had also gained some authority (e.g., the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Gospel of Thomas*).

Also important to our understanding of the formation of the New Testament canon are various canonical lists from the second and third centuries (see Theron 1957: 107–27). Most significant here are the Muratorian Canon and statements from Origen and Eusebius. The Muratorian Canon is a late second-century Latin fragment, 85 lines long, containing a list of Christian writings that were held to be canonical. The list reflects both early Christian consensus and debate about which writings were authoritative and which were not, as well as discussion of various degrees of authority. It includes all of the New Testament writings except for four, making no reference to Hebrews, James, or 1 and 2 Peter. But the list also refers to the *Wisdom of Solomon* and the *Apocalypse of Peter*, though it is acknowledged that ‘some of us are not willing that the latter be read in church’ (line 72). The author of the list further makes reference to the *Shepherd of Hermas*, which was written ‘very recently, in our times’ (line 74), and which ‘ought indeed to be read; but it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among the prophets, whose number is complete, or among the apostles, for it is after [their] time’ (lines 77–80). Thus there appear to be three kinds of Christian writings: (1) canonical books, for reading in the churches; (2) semi-canonical books about which there is a dispute as to whether or not they can be read in church; and (3) books worth reading, but of lesser authority and so inappropriate for public reading in church services. A fourth kind of book also appears in the list, books that should simply not be read because, presumably, they come from heterodox Christian groups: ‘But we accept nothing whatever of Arsinus or Valentinus or Miltiades, who also composed a new book of psalms for Marcion, together with Basilides, the Asian founder of the Cataphrygians’ (lines 81–5; see Metzger 1987: 305–7).

In his *Ecclesiastical History* Eusebius relates that Origen wrote a commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, in which Origen defended the canon of scripture accepted by the church. According to Eusebius, Origen ‘gives his testimony that he knows only four Gospels, writing somewhat as follows: “ . . . as having learnt by tradition concerning the four Gospels, which alone are unquestionable in the church of God under heaven” ’ (6.25.3–4). He goes on to quote Origen as referring also to the letters of Paul. He is aware of the Apocalypse of John, and of 1 Peter and 1 John as authentic, while he views 2 Peter, and 2 and 3 John as disputed. Regarding Hebrews, Origen thinks it unlikely that Paul wrote it, as it ‘has not the apostle’s rudeness in speech’ (6.25.11), but in his view it has the thoughts of the apostle if not his style. ‘But who wrote the epistle, in truth God knows’ (6.25.14).

Origen is aware of other gospels ‘which the Church approves’ such as the *Gospel of Peter* and the *Protevangelium of James* (*Commentary on Matthew* 10.17). He apparently also knew first-hand several gospels that he rejected as coming from false teachers.

He names gospels of Thomas, Matthias, the Twelve Apostles, Basilides, and the *Gospel according to the Egyptians*. These, he says, were written ‘without having the grace of the Holy Spirit’ (*Homily on Luke* 1; see Metzger 1987: 135–41). In his *Ecclesiastical History* (see Grant 1980; Attridge and Hata 1992) Eusebius summarizes his understanding of the New Testament canon in ways similar to what we have seen in the Muratorian Canon and in Origen. He refers to recognized, disputed, and spurious books, and then lists examples of heretical writings (*HE* 3.25.1–7).

In the second and third centuries, then, we find a general acceptance of the four Gospels and the letters of Paul as the most authoritative writings from the time of the apostles. But we also see the continued production of many pseudepigraphical and apocryphal works from different Christian groups seeking to articulate their vision of Christian faith (see Elliott 1993; Layton 1987). Though there was a general consensus regarding the Gospels and the letters of Paul (having been rescued from the grasp of Marcion), along with Acts, 1 John, and 1 Peter, it remains significant that church leaders assigned different degrees of authority to different early Christian writings. The edges of the New Testament canon, thus, remained in flux for some time. Indeed, while in 367 CE the bishop Athanasius wrote an Easter letter that included for the first time an exclusive list of all 27 New Testament ‘books’ that became commonplace, still the debate over the exact contours of the canon persisted well into the fifth and sixth centuries CE (Metzger 1987).

GEOGRAPHIC SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY

By the end of the first century significant Christian communities had already spread from Palestine to various cities in Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, and to Rome. In the middle of the first century in his letter to the Romans the apostle Paul indicated his plans to preach the Gospel in Spain, since ‘from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ’ (Rom. 15:19) and found ‘no further place for me in these regions’ (15:23). Churches in such major urban centres as Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome provided the springboard for extensive Christian expansion in the second and third centuries. Extensive material remains of early Christianity in Rome can still be seen in the catacombs there, with some of the frescoes with which they are decorated dated to the latter part of the second century CE (see Figure 9.2).

Christianity spread fairly quickly in Asia Minor, as indicated by the letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation 1–3 and by the letters of Ignatius. In addition to Ephesus, Christian communities were located in Smyrna, Pergamum, Sardis, Philadelphia, Thyatira, Troas, Magnesia, and Tralles, among other places. Pliny’s letter to the emperor Trajan (more on this on pp. 242–4) and 1 Peter 1 show that significant numbers of Christians were to be found in Bithynia and Pontus as well.

In Syria Christianity spread from Antioch to Syriac-speaking Edessa, where the late second-century Christian Bardesanes was prominent. Bardesanes represented a kind of gnosticizing docetic Christianity later rejected by the church there. Third-century Edessene Christians claimed that Thaddaeus (Addai in Syriac tradition),



Figure 9.2 A fresco of an *agape* meal from the San Callisto catacomb, later second century CE.
From Wilpert (1903: plate 41.3).

whom they believed to be one of the 72 disciples sent out by Jesus, had founded the church there, and that King Abgar had even corresponded with Jesus (see Eusebius, *HE* 1.13). At Dura-Europos, a Roman fortress on the Euphrates, archaeologists have uncovered the earliest known house-church, dating to 232 CE, in which Greek fragments of Tatian's *Diatessaron* were found. Even further to the East the third-century apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* reports that Christians were to be found in Persia and India, though there are doubts about the veracity of this tradition (Elliott 1993: 439–511).

To the West Christianity spread quickly in Italy and by the middle of the third century about a hundred episcopal sees were to be found there, with Rome as the clear centre. In Gaul and Spain Christian communities spread more slowly, but were well established by the end of the second century in Lyons, where Irenaeus was bishop, and Vienne, where Christians suffered under the persecution of Marcus Aurelius in 177. Irenaeus also reports churches in Germany and Iberia (*Against Heresies* 1.10.2). By the end of the third century episcopal sees were to be found in Arles, Rouen, Paris, Bordeaux, Trier, and Rheims. Tertullian tells of churches in Spain (*Apology* 37), as does Cyprian, who mentions churches in Leon, Astorga, Merida, and Saragossa. Christianity also appears to have spread to Britain by the end of the third century, but probably not much before then. British bishops from London and York are reported to have attended the Council of Arles in 314.

In North Africa the city of Carthage was a major centre for Christianity. Tertullian at the end of the second century and Cyprian in the middle of the third century give some indication of the vitality of the churches in the region surrounding Carthage as well as in Numidia and Tunisia. African Christianity was also prominently found in Alexandria, as the Christian school headed by Clement and then Origen bears witness in the mid and late second century. Such writings as the apocryphal *Gospel of the Egyptians*, which denigrates marriage, indicate somewhat ascetic forms of Christianity in Egypt. The presence of gnostic forms of Christianity in Egypt is also attested by the writings discovered at Nag Hammadi, though how

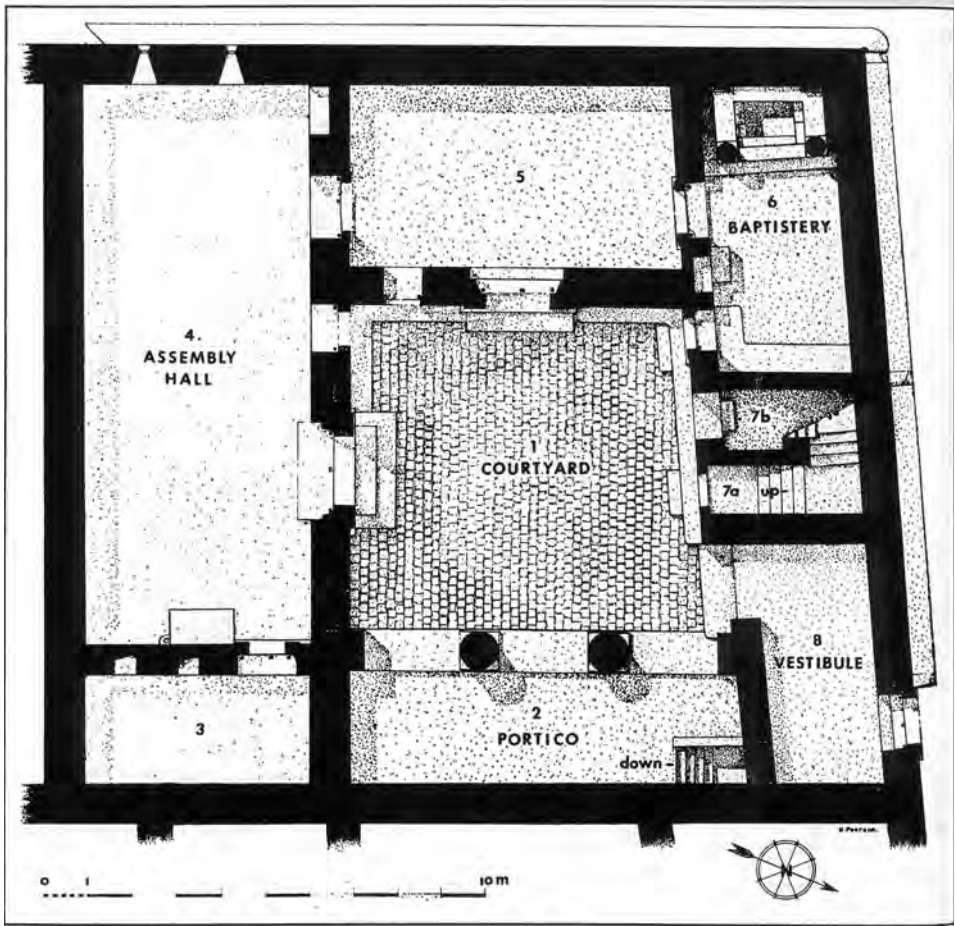


Figure 9.3 The floor-plan of a house-church dating to 232 CE from Dura-Europos. Reproduced from Snyder (1985: 70), by permission of Mercer University Press.

early gnostic Christians can be dated in Egypt is disputed (see Bauer 1971; Pearson and Goehring 1986).

CHRISTIANITY AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE

If direct social relations between Christians and Jews grew both more polarized and less frequent, relations between Christians and imperial Rome became increasingly difficult and inevitably complicated, as Roman magistrates came to view Christians as a group separate from the Jews. In an early and oft-cited second-century letter, Pliny, governor of Bithynia, seeks counsel from the emperor Trajan regarding how to deal with those who have been denounced as Christians. The letter shows how Roman officials were still very much in the process of formulating appropriate

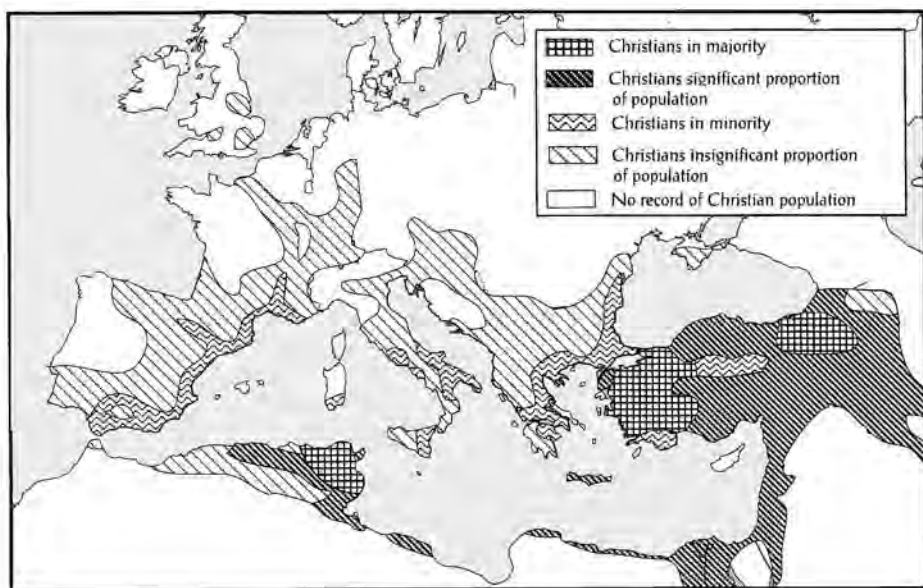


Figure 9.4 The spread of Christianity by 300 CE. Reproduced from Hinson (1996: 106), by permission of Abingdon Press.

responses to the increasing presence of Christians, and Roman Christians at that, in society. Pliny expresses uncertainty about what factors should enter into his judgments about Christians, whether considerations are made, for example, for those who repent, for the age of the accused, or for the degree of recalcitrance. Should Christians be punished only for specific crimes or merely for their association with the name 'Christian'? In the meantime, he writes:

this is the course I have taken with those who were accused before me as Christians. I asked them whether they were Christians, and if they confessed, I asked them a second and third time with threats of punishment. If they kept to it, I ordered them for execution; for I held no question that whatever it was that they admitted, in any case obstinacy and unbending perversity deserves to be punished.

(Pliny, *Letters* 10.96; in Stevenson 1957: 13–14)

Pliny continues by stating that if individuals denounced as Christians recited a prayer to the Roman gods, poured out a libation to the statue of the emperor, and cursed Christ, then they were free to go. Those who refused so to demonstrate their loyalty to Rome were punished. In response to Pliny's inquiry, the emperor Trajan agreed that Pliny had adopted the appropriate policy. Christians, he wrote, 'are not to be sought out; but if they are accused and convicted, they must be punished – yet on this condition, that whoso denies himself to be a Christian, and makes the fact plain by his action, that is, by worshipping our gods, shall obtain pardon on his repentance, however suspicious his past conduct may be' (Pliny, *Letters* 10.97; in Stevenson 1957: 16).

In general, Roman officials were suspicious of Christians for their stubborn refusal to pay homage to the emperor and to the gods of Rome, though some emperors were more concerned with the persistence and spread of Christianity than others. State-sponsored suppression of Christianity was occasional and largely regional in scope (Sordi 1994). It is significant that during the rule of Trajan (98–117 CE), the emperor's response to Pliny expressly states that Christians are not to be sought out for punishment and that anonymous accusations against Christians were not to be taken seriously. There were, to be sure, celebrated cases of Christian martyrdom, but these events were noteworthy for their infrequency (see Frend 1967; Fox 1987: 419–92).

Perhaps the best-known Christian martyr in the first half of the second century was Ignatius of Antioch. Writing to the church at Rome around 110 CE, Ignatius basically asks the Christians at Rome not to intercede on his behalf, lest he be deprived of the glories of martyrdom:

I long for the beasts that are prepared for me; . . . I will even entice them to devour me promptly . . . Grant me this favour . . . Let there come on me fire, and cross, and struggles with wild beasts, cutting, and tearing asunder, rackings of bones, mangling of limbs, crushing of my whole body, cruel tortures of the devil, may I but attain to Jesus Christ!

(*Ignatius to the Romans* 5.2–3)

It appears that popular outcry against Christians was more a problem than official state persecution. During the reign of Hadrian (117–38 CE), according to Eusebius, the emperor reaffirmed the policy of Trajan, but did not take lightly false charges brought against Christians. In a rescript to Minucius Fundanus, the proconsul of Asia, Hadrian declares: 'If then anyone accuses them [Christians], and shows that they are acting illegally, decide the point according to the nature of the offence, but by Hercules, if anyone brings the matter forward for the purpose of blackmail, investigate strenuously and be careful to inflict penalties adequate to the crime [of blackmail]' (Eusebius, *HE* 4.9.3). The emperor Antoninus Pius (138–61 CE) repeated the same policies as his predecessors. The most significant Christian martyr during this period was Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, who was put to death at the age of 86 in 155 CE. A famous account of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* survives in the collection of *Apostolic Fathers*. Even more than the actual death of Polycarp, the description of his trial and his defiant response are remarkable. When asked to 'swear by the genius of Caesar', Polycarp answered: 'If you vainly suppose that I will swear by the genius of Caesar, as you say, and pretend that you are ignorant who I am, listen plainly: I am a Christian. And if you wish to learn the doctrine of Christianity fix a day and listen' (*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 10.1).

Under the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161–80 CE), well known as a Stoic philosopher, persecution of Christians intensified somewhat. During his rule Justin Martyr was put to death in Rome. Eusebius relates that in 177 CE, in Lyons and Vienne in the region of Gaul, a number of Christians were put to death after first suffering being robbed, imprisoned, excluded from the public baths, stoned, and tortured (Eusebius, *HE* 5.1.7–63). In the African city of Scilli 12 Christians, both men and women, were martyred in 180 CE for refusing to swear by the genius of the

emperor. By contrast, the reign of Commodus (180–93 CE) provided a time of relative calm for Christians.

The third century of Christianity was marked by alternating periods of official, and at times intense, persecution and mostly peaceful relations with imperial Rome. The stable and prosperous age of the Antonine rulers had come to a close, and with the Severan dynasty (193–235) a period of relative decline commenced for the Roman empire. This gave way in the 50 years that followed (235–84 CE) to a time of constant external threats on the empire's borders and internal threats from unstable rule and military unrest. A succession of nearly twenty emperors came and went before Diocletian and then Constantine came to power at the end of the third and beginning of the fourth centuries.

A significant persecution broke out under the emperor Septimius Severus (193–211 CE) in 202 CE, when he issued an edict banning new conversions to Judaism or Christianity. According to Eusebius (*HE* 6.1–3), Christians in Alexandria felt the pressure of this persecution to such a degree that Clement, the leader of the Christian school there, fled from the city. Origen's father, Leonides, was beheaded and many other Christians in Alexandria were martyred along with him. Origen himself, only 18 years old at this time, desired to be martyred with his father, but Origen's mother 'hid all his clothes, and so laid upon him the necessity of remaining at home' (*HE* 6.2.5). The persecution under Severus was also felt in Carthage where, in 203 CE, the famous martyrdom of Perpetua occurred. Some Christians fled, some were arrested, some renounced their faith, and some paid money to stave off arrest and possible martyrdom (so Tertullian, *Concerning Flight in Persecution* 13).

After Severus' death in 211 CE, his son M. Aurelius Antoninus (Caracalla; 211–17 CE) initially continued the policy of persecution, which was especially heavy under Scapula, Proconsul of Africa (211–13 CE), who had Christians exposed to wild beasts and burned. One of Tertullian's apologetic works is addressed 'To Scapula', in which he seeks to demonstrate that Christians are no threat to the empire. He writes: 'To the emperor we render such reverential homage as is lawful for us and good for him; regarding him as the human being next to God who from God has received all his power, and is less than God alone' (*To Scapula* 2; *ANF* 3: 105–6). But in the same breath Tertullian also issues a warning in no uncertain terms: 'it cannot but distress us that no state shall bear unpunished the guilt of shedding Christian blood' (*To Scapula* 3; *ANF* 3: 106).

Christians enjoyed significant rest from persecution under the rules of Elagabalus (218–22 CE) and Severus Alexander (222–35 CE), and appear to have flourished during the latter's reign (*HE* 6.21.3). There was a brief resurgence of local persecution under the emperor Maximin (235–8 CE), who was annoyed, so Eusebius writes, that 'the house of Alexander consisted for the most part of believers' (*HE* 6.28.1). The extent of the persecution is unclear, though it appears at least that the bishop of Rome, Pontianus, was exiled and martyred. It was during this outbreak of persecution that Origen composed his *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, in which he encouraged Ambrose and Protectus (the two addressees) to stand firm in their faith when they answered the summons to appear before the emperor.

After Maximin the church experienced peace during the reign of Philip (244–9 CE), who was purported to be 'the first Christian emperor' (Jerome, *On Illustrious Men*



Figure 9.5 Coin of the emperor Severus Alexander seated on a *sella curulis*, from Rome c. 229 CE. Reproduced from T. F. Matthews *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*. Copyright 1993 by Princeton University Press. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.

54), a sentiment shared by Eusebius (*HE* 6.34.1). Eusebius relates the story that Philip desired to participate in the paschal vigil but was denied permission to enter the church by the bishop until he did penance for his sins. 'It is said that he obeyed readily, displaying by his actions how genuine and pious was his disposition towards the fear of God' (*HE* 6.34.1). Whether this is an accurate report or Eusebius' exaggeration of the emperor's piety, it seems clear that Philip was not disposed against Christians.

The relative peace and security of the church from 212–49 CE, even with the brief eruption of persecution in 235 CE, left Christians unprepared for the sharply negative turn in imperial attitudes towards Christianity that came with the rule of the emperors Decius (249–51 CE) and Valerian (253–60 CE). Whereas much of the animosity towards Christians to this point was popular in character with the occasional backing of sporadic imperial involvement, Decius was the first emperor to engage in a systematic effort to dissuade citizens from participating in Christian practices. The emperor ordered all citizens, and not just Christians, to obtain a *libellus* (a certificate) showing that they had sacrificed to the gods before imperial officials. Many nominal Christians quickly acquiesced while others fled or purchased certificates. But several Christian leaders were steadfast and submitted to punishment instead of renouncing their faith. Fabian, the bishop of Rome, was martyred; Alexander, bishop of Jerusalem, was imprisoned and died; in Antioch the church leader Babylas also perished in prison; others were martyred in Alexandria (*HE* 6.39.1–4; 6.40.1). Even the well-known Origen was imprisoned and tortured, hastening his death (*HE* 6.39.5).

Cyprian, who became bishop of Carthage (248–58 CE) shortly before the persecution broke out, followed the counsel of his fellow clergy and went into hiding, from where he continued to attend to the affairs of the church through letters and

personal envoys (see *Epistles* 5.1; *ANF* 5: 282). Cyprian's own flight from probable arrest and martyrdom during the Decian persecution later became an issue, and was especially criticized by leaders of the church at Rome. After the persecution ended in 251, Cyprian returned from hiding and faced the dilemma of how best to deal with lapsed Christians who had defiled their faith by giving in to imperial demands to offer sacrifices to the gods, but now sought repentance and reconciliation. The church was significantly divided over this issue. On one side of the debate were those, such as Novatus, who argued that lapsed Christians should be restored to fellowship immediately and that their momentary apostasy during the persecutions should be forgiven. On the other side were more rigorous Christians like Novatian, who (indebted perhaps to the teachings of their predecessors Tertullian and Hippolytus) argued that it was not within the church's power to restore to fellowship those who had once renounced their faith. Cyprian sought to provide a middle course between these two sides. In his treatise *Concerning the Lapsed*, written in 251 CE, Cyprian argued that all those who had sacrificed to the gods, and even those who had purchased certificates of sacrifice, must submit to appropriate penance and that the church could not grant easy pardon. Still, those who had given in only after suffering torture were to be shown greater leniency. Thus each individual case was to be evaluated on the basis of its own merits and the appropriate length of penance determined accordingly.

A few years after Decius, the emperor Valerian (253–60 CE) initiated renewed persecution of Christians in 257 CE. Eusebius describes Valerian as someone who was at first well disposed towards Christians (*HE* 7.10.3) but later changed his view of Christianity. In 257 CE he issued an edict seeking to restore traditional commitment to the gods of the empire through appropriate sacrifices. Perhaps such a return to the traditional Roman gods would help mend the troubles of the empire. He forbade Christian gatherings, arrested several bishops, and exiled others, including Cyprian. Valerian then ordered the execution of church leaders who refused to set an example for other Christians by offering sacrifices to the gods. Among those martyred at this time was Cyprian, who was beheaded not far from Carthage in 258 CE.

Following Valerian's capture during battle in the Eastern part of the empire (which the Christians interpreted as God's just retribution against him for his persecution of the church), his son Gallienus became emperor (260–8 CE). According to Eusebius, Gallienus 'immediately by means of edicts put an end to the persecution against us' and issued an ordinance granting 'free power to those who presided over the word to perform their accustomed duties' (*HE* 7.13.1). With this was inaugurated a more than forty-year period of relative peace between the empire and the church. There were sporadic local persecutions of Christians during this time, but nothing like those suffered under Decius and Valerian, and certainly nothing like what was to follow in the 'Great Persecution' under Diocletian.

Diocletian and the Great Persecution

Diocletian ruled from 284–304 CE and early on in his reign appeared to favour Christianity. Eusebius reports that there were many Christians in the imperial household (*HE* 8.6.1). But Diocletian's view of Christianity began to change. There

were troubles with some Christians who did not wish to serve in the army. And at a sacrifice where Diocletian was present the augurs were unable to read the typical signs from the livers of the sacrificial animals allegedly because of some Christians there who made the sign of the cross and so disrupted the sacrifice. The oracle of Apollo informed the emperor that Christians were responsible for false oracles being given. Thus Diocletian quickly decided that Christianity was interfering with significant matters of state, and in 303 CE he issued the first in a series of edicts against Christianity and began an intense attack upon Christians and their churches. Lactantius, an eyewitness to the persecution, reports in detail on the deaths of many Christians (*On the Death of the Persecutors*, 15, a work written around 317 CE). Eusebius writes: 'an imperial letter was everywhere promulgated, ordering the razing of the churches to the ground and the destruction by fire of the Scriptures . . . the order was given that the presidents of the churches should all, in every place, be first committed to prison, and then afterwards compelled by every kind of device to sacrifice' (*HE* 8.2.4). But many church leaders refused to offer sacrifice, and so were put to death. 'Presbyters and other officers of the Church were seized . . . , condemned, and together with their families led to execution' (Lactantius, *On the Death of the Persecutors* 15; *ANF* 7: 306).

When Diocletian fell ill and retired from public life in 304 CE, imperial opposition to the church continued under Galerius, who took power in the Eastern part of the empire. Galerius issued an edict in keeping with Diocletian's policy, commanding 'that all citizens in every country in each city offer sacrifices publicly and libations to the idols' (Eusebius, *Martyrs of Palestine* 3). In the western part of the empire Constantius Chlorus (the father of Constantine) ruled with less intense animosity towards the Christians. After Constantius died in 306, Constantine's soldiers proclaimed him emperor and he ruled in the West along with Licinius and Maxentius. Finally, after the death of Galerius and no little struggle over the consolidation of imperial rule, Constantine and Licinius in 313 CE jointly issued the famous Edict of Milan, which was a watershed in religious freedom especially for Christians. The emperors resolved 'to grant both to the Christians and to all others full authority to follow whatever worship each man has desired; whereby whatsoever Divinity dwells in heaven may be benevolent and propitious to us' (so Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* 48.2; see also Eusebius, *HE* 10.5.2–17). The edict also stipulated that church buildings that had been destroyed during the suppression under Diocletian should be restored along with other property.

Imperial reaction to Christianity during the second and third centuries, however, is only part of the story. Christians not only had to deal with sporadic opposition and hostility on the imperial front, they also faced significant popular opposition from Graeco-Roman society at large on a regular basis (see Wilken 1984). Christian authors were on the defensive and were concerned to respond to popular caricatures of Christian faith and teaching. Various apologists such as Aristides, Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, and Theophilus of Antioch sought respectability for Christianity in the public square of the second century. In the middle of the third century Origen wrote his famous *Contra Celsum*, a refutation of the pagan critic and Platonist Celsus, whose ridicule of Christianity in the late second century apparently still warranted Christian response in the middle of the third century. Partly in response to Origen's

defence against Celsus, the great third century neo-Platonic writer Porphyry (c. 232–303 CE) wrote one of the most significant critiques against Christians and their teachings, preserved in fragments of his *Against the Christians* (especially criticizing Christian biblical interpretation) and his *Philosophy from Oracles*. The refutation of his arguments would occupy several prominent Christian writers in the following centuries (e.g., Eusebius, Methodius, Apollinarius, Jerome, and Augustine; see Schoedel and Wilken 1979).

MOVEMENTS AND CONTROVERSIES

What remains in this chapter is to describe in broad strokes some of the more significant internal movements and controversies that shaped Christianity in the second and third centuries, many of which developments receive more attention in other chapters of this volume.

Gnosticism

The rise of various so-called ‘gnostic’ movements posed one of the most significant challenges within second-and third-century Christianity. The concern over Gnosticism can be seen in part by how committed such prominent church leaders as Irenaeus and Hippolytus were to refuting gnostic claims. Indeed, we derive most of what we know about gnostic movements from these refutations, especially Irenaeus’ *Against Heresies*. The term ‘gnosticism’ comes from the Greek word for ‘knowledge’ (*gnosis*). Especially in the second century various Christian gnostics claimed that their secret knowledge surpassed simple Christian teachings.

In their most developed form these secret teachings involved elaborate cosmologies with a generic gnostic myth about the origin of creation and the salvation of human beings from this evil and fallen physical world. Gnostic doctrine taught that the world came about as a result of a catastrophic rupture in the *pleroma*, the fullness of God, through the fall of Sophia (wisdom). This fall resulted in various emanations from the primordial beginning, with various pairs of ‘aeons’, including the emanation of Christ and the Spirit who bring Sophia back into harmony with the fullness of God (so the Valentinians). The material universe came into existence through the activity of the demiurge (creator), a kind of lesser god whose creative actions have entrapped divine sparks in a fallen material world. These divine sparks can only be ‘saved’ by ascending to the *pleroma*, and so be united again with the fullness of God from whence they came. But such return is only possible with special knowledge of the secret teachings mediated by certain gnostic leaders, knowledge they believed had been revealed by the saviour Christ. Christ was indeed a redeemer who came from God, but redemption was not to be found in his physical death and resurrection so much as in his secret teachings. The opening line of the *Gospel of Thomas* is illustrative: ‘These are the secret words which the living Jesus spoke’ (Elliott 1993: 135). In the view of the gnostics, Jesus was not really a flesh and blood human being, rather he was a docetic figure, one who appeared (the Greek *dokei* meaning ‘he appears’) to be fully human in order to fool the creator, but was in fact

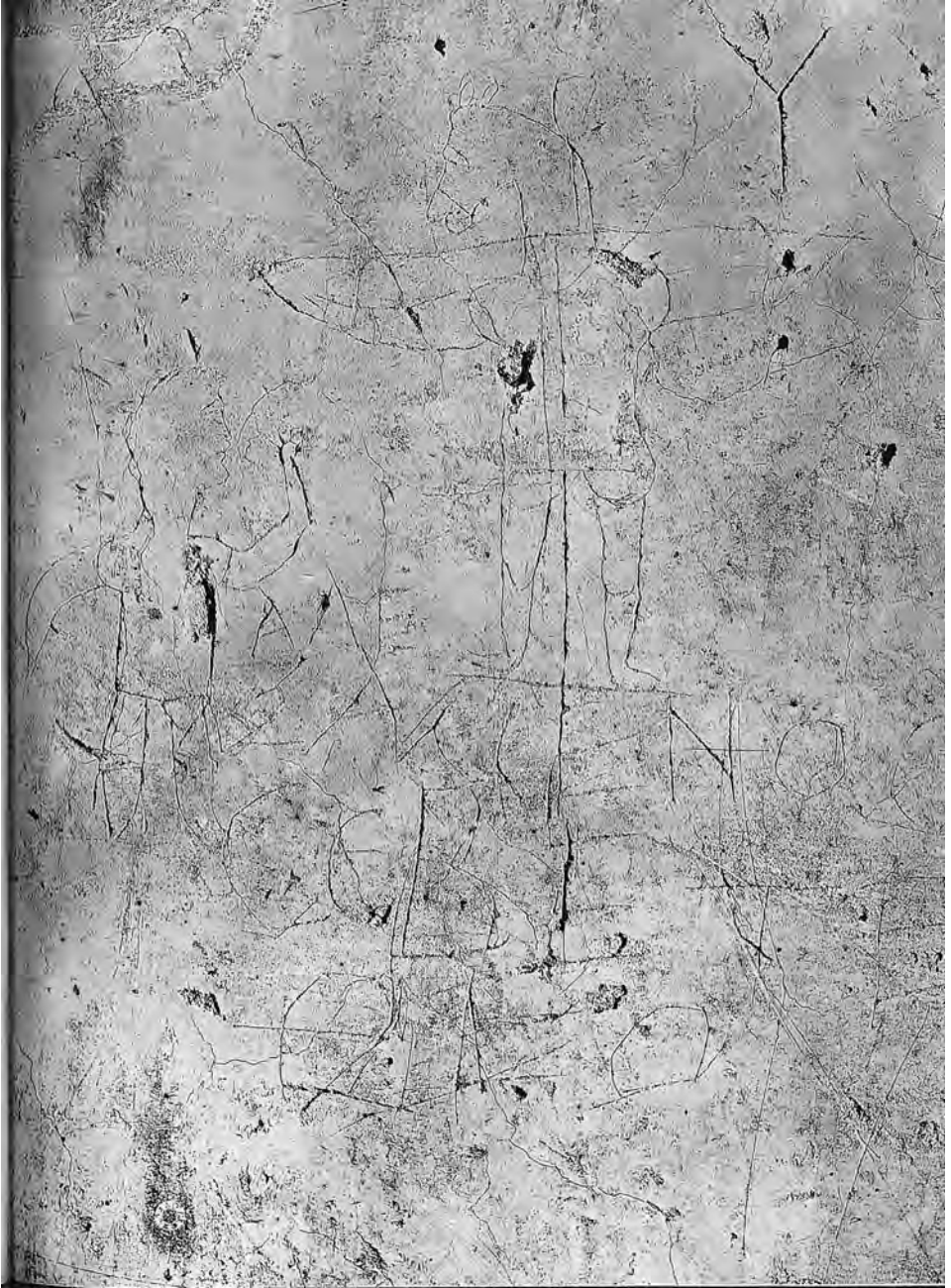


Figure 9.6 A graffito from the Palatine in Rome, *c.* 200 CE, of the ass-headed Christ crucified, with the inscription, 'Alexandros worships his God'. Reproduced from T. F. Matthews, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*. Copyright 1993 by Princeton University Press. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.

only a spirit. Objections to docetic views can already be found in 1 John 4:2 and 2 John 7.

There were many different gnostic groups with a great variety of teachings. In addition to the Valentinians, the most influential group in second-century Christianity, the Basilidians were prominent. References are also made to the Sethians, the Cerinthians, and the Carpocratians, among others. The Valentinian gnostics produced such writings as the *Gospel of Truth* and *Ptolemy's Letter to Flora*, and made explicit claims to be Christians, if Christians with deeper knowledge. Other gnostic groups, such as the Sethians, were less overtly Christian in their orientation (see Layton 1987; Rudolph 1987).

Despite the concern of many Christian leaders with (in their view) false gnostic teachings, other Christian leaders could use language similar to the gnostics in order to call Christians to higher knowledge, to deeper understanding and spiritual maturity. Clement of Alexandria (c. 160–216 CE), for example, made a distinction between the simple faith of Christians and 'true gnostics', those few Christians who had a greater and more privileged 'gnosis'. These true Christian gnostics derived their deeper understanding from a combination of sources: allegorical interpretation of the scriptures, an incorporation of Platonic ideas, and secret traditions (*Stromateis* 6.7; 7.3, 7–15; *ANF* 2: 493–4). Though Clement attacked the docetic teachings of gnostic groups, he could use language similar to the gnostics. In a reflection on why Christ ate, for example, Clement reflects: 'He ate, not for the sake of the body, which was kept together by a holy energy, but in order that it might not enter into the minds of those who were with Him to entertain a different opinion of Him . . . He was entirely impassible, inaccessible to any movement of feeling – either pleasure or pain' (*Stromateis* 6.9; *ANF* 2:496). Origen, Clement's successor at Alexandria, likewise sought deeper spiritual understanding and hidden meanings in biblical texts. And although he did not advocate the return of divine sparks to the *pleroma*, he did argue for the doctrine of *apokatastasis*, a thoroughly spiritual eschatology in which all of the universe and all humanity would ultimately be restored to its original harmony with God (*First Principles* 2.3.1).

Montanism

At the same time that Christian unity was being challenged by gnostic movements, another group, the Montanists, arose in the second half of the second century in the area of Phrygia in Asia, though they spread quickly to Rome and to Christian communities in North Africa. Montanus, a convert to Christianity, declared that he was possessed by the Holy Spirit and so started speaking in tongues and prophesying. He was soon joined by two women, Priscilla and Maximilla, who likewise claimed to be inspired by the Spirit. Together they claimed to have a 'new prophecy', a new revelation that had been given to them in keeping with the Christian faith they had received. This new revelation included an intense eschatological expectation of the sudden return of Christ, who they believed would inaugurate the new Jerusalem and with it God's kingdom in the town of Pepuza in Phrygia (Montanus' home town). They advocated an ethical code of tremendous rigour that involved more frequent fasting and a greater emphasis on virginity. Montanists also refused

to restore those who had fallen away during persecution, and they embraced martyrdom. Most of what we know about Montanism comes from its most famous adherent, Tertullian, who joined the Montanist group around 206 CE (see Eusebius, *HE* 5.14–19).

Monarchianism

Another split along doctrinal lines arose in the latter half of the second century as Christians sought to clarify both the unity and yet the distinction between Christ the Son and God the Father. In Justin Martyr's view, Christ the divine Logos was 'another God' beside the Father (Osborn 1973). Justin's analogous description of the Logos as distinct from the Father in the same way that one torch derives its flame from another begged the charge of ditheism, threatening the single oneness, the *monarchia*, of God the creator. Thus, the '*alogoi*', those opposed to Justin's Logos theology, argued for the unity of the Father and the Son. At the beginning of the third century a certain Sabellius, about whom we know little, apparently advocated that the Father and the Son were merely different aspects of the same being, the same one God. But this position led in turn to the accusation of 'Patripassianism', that to so closely identify the Son with the Father implied that the Father suffers with the Son. (This view has also been termed 'modalism' since Father/Son/Spirit were seen as different modes of the same being.)

The debate broke out as a hostile controversy in Rome under the episcopacy of Zephyrinus (198–217 CE). Sabellius led the monarchian position, and Hippolytus defended the logos theology that the Father and the logos are two distinct *prosôpa* ('persons'). Callistus, a deacon at Rome, argued for a middle path between these two extremes. When Callistus succeeded Zephyrinus as bishop of Rome in 217 CE, Hippolytus led a split from the church, partly over the Monarchian dispute, partly over Callistus' lax approach to readmitting lapsed Christians, and also because of Hippolytus' apparent general disdain for Callistus as a person (see *Refutation of All Heresies* 9.6). The Monarchian controversy continued well into the third century. Tertullian wrote a strong tract against Praxeas (a Monarchian from Asia Minor who had opposed the Montanist movement), and proposed language that became very influential in the dispute. He held the Father and the Son in unity, but a unity in which there was a distinction. As Tertullian put it, God is 'one substance consisting in three persons'. This language was adopted in the middle of the third century by the Roman presbyter Novatian in his *On the Trinity* and so set the pattern for Christian churches through the Trinitarian debates that would follow.

The Quartodeciman Debate

Another dispute that challenged church unity revolved around how the date of Easter was to be determined. Churches in Asia Minor calculated that the celebration of Easter should be at the same time as the Jewish Passover; namely the fourteenth day of the Jewish month of Nisan, regardless of which day it would fall on, hence the name 'quartodeciman'. But in Rome the celebration of Easter was set for the Sunday after the Jewish Passover, and the date determined as the Sunday following the first

full moon after the spring equinox. Eusebius relates a report from Irenaeus that in the mid-second century Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, went to Rome to discuss with the Roman bishop Anicetus various differences in Easter observance and the dating of Passover. According to Eusebius they agreed to disagree with each other's practice, but not to break off fellowship as a result (*HE* 5.24.14–17). But about thirty years later (c. 190 CE) controversy broke out when a different bishop of Rome, Victor, tried to force the issue and called for uniform observance of Easter in all the churches according to the Roman practice. In the end the practice adopted by the Roman church became the accepted custom throughout most Christian communities, even if the quartodeciman observance continued for some time in dwindling numbers of Eastern churches.

Other debates also erupted from time to time. For example, in 254 CE a vitriolic dispute arose over whether or not schismatic Christians needed to be rebaptized in order to demonstrate repentance. Cyprian in Carthage held that they did, while Stephen in Rome held that they did not (cf. Cyprian, *Epistles* 70, 75; Eusebius, *HE* 7.5.1–6). There were also a series of schisms resulting from rival claims to the episcopal see of Rome (Hippolytus versus Callistus in 217 CE; Novatian versus Cornelius in 251 CE).

UNITY IN DIVERSITY AND DIVISION

Amidst all these various disputes and controversies in second- and third-century Christianity, what held the churches together in relative unity? Several unifying factors can be identified. Certainly the authority attributed to the writings of the emerging New Testament canon was very significant, as the use in particular of the same Gospels and the letters of Paul forged a common bond between Christians of different theological stripes across large geographic and cultural divides. When Christians in different locales gathered for worship and read from the same new (and old) scriptures, even if they did not share a common lectionary, this practice allowed the formation of a common Christian identity. There were surely disputes about the contours of the canon, but the collective use of the four Gospels, along with the letters of Paul, 1 John and 1 Peter, was a powerful unifying force.

Another unifying factor was the institutional structure of the church, with its emphasis on local ruling bishops who gathered in times of crisis in an effort to shape a common direction for the diverse clusters of Christian churches. Especially important here were the Christian leaders and bishops from Rome, Alexandria, Carthage and Antioch. Episcopal authority was seen as grounded in apostolic authority and eventually in apostolic succession (von Campenhausen 1969). Already at the end of the first century Clement of Rome thought it within the scope of his authority to write and admonish the church in Corinth for deposing various presbyters. Appealing to the authority of the apostles before him Clement writes:

Our apostles also knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the title of bishop. For this cause . . . they appointed those who have

been already mentioned, and afterwards added the codicil that if they should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministry.

(*First Epistle to the Corinthians* 44.1–2).

Among the so-called ‘Apostolic Fathers’ in the early second century, Ignatius of Antioch also appealed to the authority of bishops and elders, whom he saw as agents of Christ and the apostles over against rival teachers. Ignatius put it strongly: ‘it is clear that we must regard the bishop as the Lord himself (*Ignatius to the Ephesians* 6.1; also see 3.2). At the end of the second century in his treatise against gnostic heresies Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, appealed to the authority of bishops that derived from apostolic succession. He wrote:

This is true Gnosis: the teaching of the apostles, and the ancient institution of the church, spread throughout the entire world, and the distinctive mark of the body of Christ in accordance with the successions of bishops, to whom the apostles entrusted each local church, and the unfeigned preservation, coming down to us, of the scriptures, with a complete collection allowing for neither addition nor subtraction.

(*Against Heresies* 4.33.8; see also 3.3.1–4; Grant 1997: 161)

Finally, another unifying factor in second- and third-century Christianity was the emphasis of various bishops on basic credal statements, most notably the ‘rule of faith’ which summarized central Christian beliefs. The ‘rule of faith’ found its most ardent advocates at the end of the second and beginning of the third centuries in the writings of Hippolytus, Tertullian and Irenaeus. Church leaders saw the ‘rule of faith’ as having apostolic authority, and confirmed by the teachings of scripture. In his *Apostolic Tradition*, Hippolytus relates formulaic questions addressed to newly baptized members who were to be received into church membership: ‘Dost thou believe in God the Father Almighty? . . . Dost thou believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary . . . ?’ (*Apostolic Tradition* 21–2; Stevenson 1957: 131). And Tertullian, writing for the faithful against heresies, states:

Now, as to this rule of faith . . . it is, you must know, that which prescribes the belief that there is one only God, and that He is none other than the Creator of the world, who produced all things out of nothing through His own Word . . . that this Word is called His Son.

(*The Prescription of Heretics* 13; ANF 3: 249)

Tertullian’s ‘rule of faith’ goes on to include standard Christian notions regarding the virgin birth, the Spirit of God poured out in Jesus’ ministry, the death and resurrection of Jesus, his ascension, the sending of the Spirit, and expectation of the second coming. He concludes, ‘This rule, as it will be approved, was taught by Christ, and raises amongst ourselves no questions except those which heresies introduce, and which make men heretics.’ Similarly, Irenaeus could write that the church ‘has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith’, going on to describe the same kind of stock features of Christian belief found in Tertullian and Hippolytus. Irenaeus concludes:

the church, having received this preaching, and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world . . . believes these points of doctrine just as if she had but one soul, and one and the same heart, and she proclaims them, and teaches them, and hands them down, with perfect harmony, as if she possessed only one mouth.

(*Against Heresies* 1.2–3; Stevenson 1957: 115)

Through use of a common set of scriptures, held together by a relatively unified group of bishops who advocated a generic rule of faith, Christians in the second and third centuries managed to maintain a sense of unity even amidst the significant diversity and the various debates that occupied Christians during this time. The persecutions suffered by Christians also served to forge a sense of unity and common purpose. These factors positioned Christian churches at the beginning of the fourth century to welcome the efforts of emperor Constantine to push for a unified Christian church that would aid in unifying the empire. The unity of tradition, of course, was in part the product of a revisionist memory, but a memory that second- and third-century Christian leaders sought collectively to hand on to those that followed.

NOTES

- 1 The complete *Ante-Nicene Fathers* and *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* are all available free of charge in electronic versions on the World Wide Web through the Early Church Fathers homepage at <http://www.ccel.wheaton.edu/fathers2/>. This material can also be downloaded from HYPERLINK <http://www.redbay.com/newbies/mag/ecfwh.htm>. Other standard print collections of the Church Fathers include the *Ancient Christian Writers* series published by Paulist Press (1946–), now at 57 volumes, of which about a third come from the second and third century, and *The Fathers of the Church* series published by Catholic University of America Press (1947–), now at 98 volumes, of which about one-fifth come from the second and third century. A handy collection of Christian writings from the second and third centuries can be found in Ehrman (1999) and Stevenson (1957).

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FROM CONSTANTINE TO THEODOSIUS (AND BEYOND)



Bill Leadbetter

THE GREAT PERSECUTION (303–11) AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Introduction

In some respects, the Great Persecution – begun in 303 under Diocletian and his three fellow emperors (Maximian, Galerius and Constantius, the four of them comprising the ‘Tetrarchy’ described on pp. 260–1) and continuing until 311 CE ought not to have been a surprise to the Christians of the empire in the early fourth century. Although they had enjoyed a long peace in which the church had both grown and prospered, that very success caused alarm amongst those most committed to the preservation of traditional values (de Labriolle 1942: 302–15; Barnes 1976a; Lane Fox 1986: 585–95; Judge 1983). Most prominent of these were the emperors themselves. Not only did Diocletian assert the value of tradition in his public statements, but he also actively attacked such practitioners of dangerous novelties as the Manichaeans (*Mosaicarum et Romanarum Legum Collatio* 15.3).

When it arrived, it did so incrementally. A series of edicts, each more severe than the last, demanded the submission of Christians to the imperial will (de Ste. Croix 1954; Corcoran 1996: 179–82). The effect of these edicts upon the Christians of the empire varied both with the degree of severity with which they were enforced (which differed from place to place) and the attitude of local Christian communities towards them. These differing attitudes towards the demands of the state upon Christian communities led to the same range of responses to the imperial edicts as had occurred during the period of the Decian and Valerianic persecutions in the 250s: compliance with the edicts; defiance of the government; flight from the centres of persecution to rural refuges; and doing nothing.

At the same time, popular Christianity exalted martyrdom (Brown 1981: 33–4; Lane Fox 1986: 434–50). The principal consequence of this was, as in the 250s with the emergence of Novatianism, that some Christian communities found themselves violently divided amongst themselves. This was particularly so in Rome, North Africa and Egypt. In the latter two, communal disagreements hardened into discrete schismatic communities. Galerius brought persecution to an end in 311, acknow-

ledging the failure of repression as a tool to recall practitioners of misguided novelty to ancient truth (Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum* 34.1). What he failed to note in his palinode was the unintended success of the persecution in generating discord amongst Christian communities (never in any case very united) sufficient to sunder them.

The papal succession

In Rome, Pope Marcellinus handed over the scriptures in obedience to the edict, thus leaving the see in a position of uncertainty. Although he died late in 304, an episcopal election to replace him was not possible until 306. His successor Marcellus regarded this act as apostasy and so he posthumously damned Marcellinus, removing his name from the official episcopal list. Many of the Christians in Rome, some of whom had also obeyed the edicts, were angered and violence broke out. As a consequence, Marcellus was exiled. A further papal election failed to resolve the situation. As a result, Rome remained without a bishop until the election of Miltiades in July 311 (Barnes 1981: 38).

The schism of Meletius

In Egypt, Peter the Bishop of Alexandria fled the city, while a number of other bishops were imprisoned leaving the church bereft of ecclesiastical leadership. This vacuum was filled by Meletius, the newly ordained bishop of Lycopolis (modern Assiut) who performed a number of ordinations, but without warrant from Peter. Imprisoned bishops complained of this behaviour to Peter, whose authority Meletius ceased to recognize. Instead, Meletius expanded his activities into Alexandria (Williams 1987: 32–41).¹ The result was a polarized Christian communion. According to the Epiphanius' account, two distinct communities now emerged, the 'Catholic Church', in communion with Peter and his successor Alexander, and Meletius' 'Church of the Martyrs' (*Panarion* 68.3.8). Although the difference between the two communities was one of church order, rather than one of doctrine, it engendered a schism which persisted long past the deaths of both Peter and Meletius.

The beginnings of the Donatist schism

Donatism began in similar circumstances, although here the chronology is less clear and has been a matter of some dispute (Barnes 1975: 17–20; Frend and Clancy 1977). What is certain is that the issue which split the African church for generations was the status of those who had, whether genuinely or only apparently, handed over (*traditio*) scriptures to the Roman authorities in accordance with the imperial edicts. Those who had done so (*traditores*) were regarded by the Donatists as apostate, and ordinations by *traditor* bishops were held to be invalid. A detailed description of the origins, character and fate of Donatism appears in Chapter 37 of this volume.

Christianity becomes a political issue

A series of edicts of escalating severity had been deployed against the empire's Christians from February 303 onwards. It is clear from the evidence, however, that these edicts were not uniformly applied throughout the entire empire. What this means is that there was substantial disagreement amongst members of the empire's governing elite about the merits of the persecution. This disagreement went as high as the imperial college itself, which became increasingly fragmented. To appreciate how and why this occurred we must set out the history of constitutional arrangements in place at the time the Great Persecution broke out.

Dyarchy and Tetrarchy

When Diocletian became emperor in November 284, he swiftly raised an old friend, Maximian, to the imperial dignity (first with the rank of Caesar, then as Augustus) in order to assist him in addressing the many problems of the empire (Leadbetter 1998c). This arrangement is referred to as the 'Dyarchy', or 'rule by two'. But the problems proved too substantial for even two emperors to deal with. Thus, in 293, the imperial college was doubled with each Augustus taking a deputy with the rank of Caesar. Diocletian's Caesar was Galerius, junior (by reason of age) to Maximian's Caesar, Constantius. Thus was created the 'Tetrarchy', or 'rule by four', an institution which was celebrated in imperial statuary (see Figure 10.1). The empire was not formally divided between the four emperors, although each tended to concentrate his efforts in a particular region. Rather, it remained a unity, cohering by virtue of the harmony (*concordia*) between the Tetrarchs, and bound by their loyalty to Diocletian (see Figure 10.2).

In 305, Diocletian and Maximian abdicated. Diocletian's resignation of imperial power was voluntary, but Maximian had been coerced into retirement by Diocletian and subsequently proved himself a most reluctant pensioner. Constantius became the nominal senior Augustus, with Galerius becoming his junior. Galerius, however, had strengthened his own position, in so far as the new nominees to the Caesarship, Severus and Maximinus Daia, were loyal to him. Accordingly, the empire was more obviously divided between the two Augusti, with clearly delineated spheres of authority. Constantius took direct responsibility for Britain, Gaul and Spain; Severus for Italy, Africa and the Upper Danube; Galerius for the Balkan provinces and Asia Minor; Maximinus for Syria, Egypt and Libya.

The arrangement worked well enough until Constantius died in July 306 in York, England. By his side was his son, Constantine, who was immediately proclaimed as emperor by his father's army in that city. A head from a statue of Constantine discovered in 1823 during excavations for a drain in Stonegate, York (Richmond 1944), an exact replica of which is now housed in the Foundations of York Minster, indicates that Constantine or his supporters remembered and treasured his connection with the town (see Figure 10.3).

Constantine's proclamation as emperor represented a usurpation of the right of Severus, Constantius' Caesar, to succeed as Augustus. Anxious to avoid confrontation, Galerius resolved the problem by recognizing Severus as Augustus and



Figure 10.1 Statue of the Tetrarchs, now in Venice. Photo Bill Leadbetter.

Constantine as his Caesar. Encouraged by Constantine's success in grafting himself into the imperial college, Maxentius, the son of Maximian, had himself proclaimed emperor by disgruntled praetorian guardsmen in Rome. But there was no room for him; the college of four was full. When Severus marched on the city of Rome, Maximian came out of retirement to support his son, Severus' army deserted to him and Severus himself was taken prisoner. The *concordia* which had held Diocletian's tetrarchy together had vanished.

Christianity and imperial confrontation

The Great Persecution was never an entirely popular affair. There is some evidence, for example, of sympathetic traditional believers hiding Christians who were being sought by the authorities. Even while Diocletian was still in power, the edicts of persecution were not uniformly enforced. The fourth edict, issued early in 304 and ordering universal sacrifice, was never enforced in the western provinces of the empire (de Ste. Croix 1954: 84–96; Corcoran 1996: 182). After the death of Constantius and the fragmentation of the empire, different official attitudes towards Christians prevailed in different areas.

Constantine seems to have been the first of the emperors to order a cessation of official hostilities and a restoration of property to the churches (Lactantius, *On the*



Figure 10.2 Relief showing a sacrifice by Diocletian and Maximian, on the Arch of Galerius in Thessalonika. This scene, from the early fourth century CE, is one of the last representations of pagan sacrifice in Roman art. Photo J. C. N. Coulston.

Deaths of the Persecutors 24.9). This has been taken by some to mean that Constantine was already a Christian (Alföldi 1948: 8–9; Elliot 1987, 1989). This is unlikely. What is more probable is that Constantine was making a clear distinction between himself and his colleagues in the matter of religious policy (Barnes 1981: 28). The favour which he showed towards Christianity and Christians was in sharp contrast to the hostility with which they met in the remainder of the empire. He also found them a useful resource. At least one bishop, Ossius of Cordova, soon became one of his senior advisers. I offer a detailed discussion of Constantine's attitude to Christianity in Chapter 42 of this volume.

Like Constantine, Maxentius also discerned the virtues of toleration. Soon after he took power in Rome and Africa, he too forsook a policy of hostility for one of forbearance (Frend 1965: 571; de Decker 1968; Cullhed 1994: 72–3). This involved him in the vexed internal affairs of the Roman bishopric. It was by his authority that Pope Marcellus was exiled, as were those contending to succeed to the see (Barnes 1981: 38). Although Maxentius' intervention appears hostile at first glance, it served to prevent the Christian community in Rome from fragmenting. His cessation of persecution was certainly welcome to the Christians under his rule, and one scholar has even gone so far as to suggest that Maxentius was himself Christian (de Decker 1968: 481).

This relative benevolence towards the Christians in the western provinces of the



Figure 10.3 Head of Constantine from York Minster. Photo copyright Dean and Chapter of York and reproduced by their kind permission.

empire contrasted with the continuation of the assault upon the faithful in the East. Galerius remained true to the policy of Diocletian; Maximinus, discerning the ideological significance of the struggle, prosecuted it with greater and more sustained vigour. Galerius has, in the past, been labelled 'a fanatical pagan' (Barnes 1981: 19; see also Frend 1965: 490; Jones 1964: 71). This sobriquet more correctly belongs to Maximinus, his nephew and Caesar, under whose hand martyrdoms continued (Davies 1989: 71–6). Eusebius' *Martyrs of Palestine* provides a comprehensive, if jaundiced account of the consequences of Maximinus' policies in one province; the *Acta* of Phileas and Philoromus in another (for a text and translation into English, Musurillo 1972: 328–353). Maximinus promoted known enemies of Christianity to positions of considerable importance, most notably Sossianus Hierocles, who was appointed prefect of Egypt (Barnes 1976a: 243–4; Eusebius *Martyrs of Palestine* 8.1).

Galerius attempts to re-impose uniformity

The divisions in the empire which these differing policies represent could not be long sustained without a measure of confrontation and conflict. Galerius attempted to circumvent this at a conference of the tetrarchs held in 308 at the city of Carnuntum.

The most important consequence of this conference was the appointment of Licinius, one of Galerius' oldest friends, as Augustus in place of Severus. This arrangement offended Constantine who had sought to take Severus' place as the ruler of the West, and ignored Maxentius, with whose elimination Licinius was charged. Maximinus, too, resented the appointment of Licinius over his head and so, rather than reunite the imperial college, Galerius exacerbated its disunity.

When Galerius died in 311, his immediate heritage was a divided empire. On his deathbed, he decreed toleration for all Christians. This represented a victory for the policies of toleration practised by Constantine and Maxentius, but one which did nothing to unite his fractured realm. Galerius' death also ignited a struggle for mastery between the four remaining emperors: Maximinus in the East; Licinius in the Balkans; Maxentius in Italy and Africa; Constantine in Britain, Gaul and Spain. A certain polarization was inevitable. Constantine allied with Licinius; Maxentius with Maximinus. It was *en route* to his war with Maxentius, Constantine claimed, that he had the vision which marked his conversion to Christianity. His subsequent defeat of Maxentius at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge – with his standard, the *Labarum*, and his men's shields for the first time displaying the *chi-rho* sign for Christ (as I explain in Chapter 42) – certainly confirmed to him that he now enjoyed the patronage of the God of the Christians.

The political consequences of the 'conversion' of Constantine

The question of whether Constantine really converted to Christianity, and if so when, has continued to excite controversy, as I set out in Chapter 42. What does matter for present purposes, however, is the way in which Constantine came to frame a religious policy with significant political implications which did more than merely tolerate Christianity.

Constantine and Licinius

Immediately following his defeat of Maxentius, Constantine confirmed his policy of toleration in an edict issued from Rome in which he ordered the cessation of persecution everywhere (Corcoran 1996: 187). This order was principally directed at Maximinus, who initially complied. Some months afterwards, Constantine met with Licinius in the city of Milan. There, the alliance between the two was sealed by the marriage of Licinius to Constantine's sister Constantia (Pohlsander 1993). They also produced a document, 'The Edict of Milan', which was enforced in the territory which they ruled directly. This granted universal toleration and the restitution of all Christian property.

In Chapter 42 I set out the details of the developing relationship between Constantine and Licinius and I need only summarize them here. Licinius soon engaged Maximinus in war and defeated him at Adrianople, thus becoming master of the East. Yet his support of Christianity at this time was soured by political disputes with Constantine. In 316 CE a war broke out between them which Licinius lost, resulting in the transfer of most of his Eastern possessions to Constantine. Thereafter Licinius revived the persecution of Christians, probably regarding them as a fifth

column in his midst. In 324 he was finally defeated and deposed by Constantine. All persecution of Christianity came to an end.

The foundation of Constantinople

One of the most enduring of all Constantine's acts was his foundation of a city on the Bosphorus called Constantinople in 324. By 330 the city was fit to become his permanent base. He had churches constructed there, but forbade the erection of pagan temples, while still seeking to fill the city with works of art purloined from all over Greece.

Martyrs and saints

The final gift of the Great Persecution to the Christian churches was a rich martyrological heritage. Graves of martyrs had become holy places to Christians by the late third century (Brown 1981: 33–4). Although the Great Persecution produced martyrs, it was not particularly productive of them. Many martyr narratives were nevertheless constructed which located their heroes within its historical context. The traditions which these have generated have become rich and varied. St George, the patron saint of England, was slain at the order of Diocletian; St Demetrius, the saint of Thessalonica, at the order of Maximian (probably meaning Galerius). Other military saints emerged, both real and fanciful: St Theagenes; St Theodore, the slayer of a dragon; St Procopius (Delehay 1909).

Moreover, while the Great Persecution did not occasion the invention of the genre of hagiography, it did provide an enormous amount of subject matter. The stories of martyrs were told and retold, written and rewritten (with advantages) to edify believers. To the compilers of such *acta*, historicity was far less an issue than moral value, although such stories may preserve valuable information (Barnes 1982: 176–180).

In essence, a new, and specifically Christian, mythology was being crafted. The Christian poet Prudentius recognized this quite explicitly in the late fourth century when he produced an epic poem 'On the Crowns of the Martyrs' (*Peristephanôn Liber*) which rewrote hagiography as Latin poetry (Palmer 1989; Roberts 1993). Four of the martyrs whom he commemorated in verse – St Eulalia, St Vincent, St Quirinus and St Romanus – were victims of the Great Persecution.

The final heritage of the Great Persecution was its commemoration. It provided the newly emerging Christian mythology of martyrdom with a rich vocabulary of ordeal. The suffering of its victims (real or imagined) sanctified new places, which were, in turn, embellished and decorated by new generations of Christian patrons.

CONSTANTINE AND THE CHURCH

In my profile of Constantine in Chapter 42 of this volume I expand in some detail upon the relationship between him and Christianity. He became an active patron and benefactor of Christianity, although not in such a way as to offend pagan

sentiment unduly. He also began involving himself actively in intra-Christian disputes over issues such as Donatism and Arianism. So we find him subsidizing the church and exempting the Christian clergy from civic duties, possibly as early as 313 CE. On the other hand, he began to strip the Jews of some of the privileges they had hitherto enjoyed. He may also have banned sacrifice, although the evidence for this is equivocal.

Above all, he began the construction of vast edifices for Christian worship, such as the churches of St John Lateran, St Peter's on the Vatican hill (which involved a huge earth-moving project), Santa Croce in Gerusalemme and St Lawrence.

In Chapter 42 I have set out details of the active interest which Constantine took in the Donatist controversy and the dispute over Arianism, a view denying to Christ equal status with the Father, which led to the Council of Nicaea – in which Constantine took a most active role – that decided that the relationship between the Father and the Son was best expressed in the word *homoousios* – 'of one being with'.

CONSTANTINE'S ACHIEVEMENT

Although the issue of the conversion of Constantine is one which remains vexed and controversial, his public adoption of Christianity had profound effects. For the church itself, the emperor became a new source of authority. Constantine's involvement with the Arian controversy did not cease after Nicaea; rather, it intensified. He became the policeman of the settlement, thereby establishing a role for the emperor as the arbiter and enforcer of orthodoxy. For himself, he claimed the role of 'bishop of those outside the Church', and at the time of his death was preparing for an expedition against Persia which featured many of the lineaments of a holy war (Barnes 1985).

To Christians such as Eusebius, he was the new Moses, who had led the church from servitude into the promised land of established power and recognition. In an oration, he compared Constantine's court to that of God in Heaven, using the traditional language of mimesis to develop an extended simile of Constantine as the vicegerent of the Lord (Baynes 1933; Cranz 1952; Drake 1976; Chesnut 1986; 141–74). For the Donatists, on the other hand, it was business as usual. The empire was again their foe; only the nature of imperial displeasure had changed. Within the empire as a whole, moreover, Constantine intensified a process of change which can, in retrospect, be labelled 'Christianization'.

THE CHRISTIANIZATION OF THE EMPIRE

Introduction: 'Christianization' as a term

There has long been a historiographical tradition to refer to the 'conversion' of Rome. Such a term, however, is suspiciously modern and revivalist in its implication. It has therefore been preferred, more recently, to refer to the 'Christianization', of Rome – a process which can more readily be traced and tracked. Institutions

'Christianize' when they assume the symbolic and written language of Christianity. This is only possible to achieve in a sustained fashion when large numbers of people have themselves adopted that language as their own. Any assessment of 'Christianization' must therefore take into account both the transformation of such institutions as the aristocracy, the army, and the imperial office itself, but also the underlying changes in popular culture.

The new attractions of Christianity

The conversion of Constantine did not make the Roman empire a Christian empire, nor could it. The emperor neither mandated Christianity for his subjects, nor abandoned the traditional pagan language and iconography of coin portraits. He did not interfere with the imperial cult; he retained the title of *pontifex maximus*, and, after his death, he received apotheosis in the traditional form from the Roman Senate. Yet Constantine's conversion does mark a change: at the very least, an intensification and acceleration of a process which had commenced with the apostles.

Yet for three centuries the church had existed in a world which was only approachable through the medium of a heavily circumscribed religious choice. Becoming a Christian had meant an instinctual separation from the social world of classical culture. Adherents of a proscribed cult lived within a subculture vulnerable to external attack and internal subversion through heresy. As such, they had existed at the mercy of neighbours who feared them, and blamed them when disaster fell.

Constantine's own declared Christianity, together with his unstinting generosity towards the church, sent an indubitable signal to his people. Christianity was now accessible. The gulf of otherness between the church and its social environment had been bridged: becoming a Christian ought no longer to invite fear, suspicion and rejection. It was a signal which was amplified by the stratagem which he employed to pay for this euergetism: the pillage of the treasures of the temples.

The blandishments of wealth

Soon after Constantine had secured control of the East, and simultaneous with his intervention in the Arian controversy, trusted operatives were dispersed to inspect and confiscate the riches which had been accumulated by the gods. Works of art were remitted to Constantine's new city on the Bosphorus. Deprived of their contexts, they served instead to transmit the scale of Constantine's victory over the past. Bullion, gilding, jewels, the thank-offerings of the gods' grateful clients, provided instead the foundation for the historic wealth of the church. A ban on sacrifice is consistent with the hostility reflected in the spoliation of the temples, although (as already mentioned) the evidence for it is equivocal.

This redistribution of resources sent a powerful, but unspoken, message to contemporaries. The traditional religion of the empire had been cut loose from imperial patronage; its place in the social and political fabric of society was no longer integral. For its part, the newly wealthy church was able to call upon vast sums in its work of charity. The church had traditionally supported those of its members who were marginal within classical society: widows and orphans, the infirm and the

destitute. The scale of support which the church could now offer drew many such new adherents.

Charity was not the only benefit which the church could impart to its deserving members. Constantine had endowed the church with legal privileges. The exemption of clergy from the performance of civic duties was a powerful enticement to men of the curial class. Every town in the Roman empire was regulated and administered by a council (*curia*) of local magnates, meeting in a building of the same name (see Figure 10.4). These magnates formed a class, the *curiales*, which had long borne the burden of local patronage and civic duty. For decades, they had complained of the burden of patronage which they were compelled to bear. In the years of Diocletian and Constantine this became even more onerous since the revenue bases of the cities themselves had collapsed as a consequence of the period of sustained inflation during the third century.

In exempting the clergy from curial duty, Constantine provided a powerful inducement, not merely to convert but to engage in the public life of the church. Such an inducement was rendered all the more enticing by the legislation which recognized the juridical authority of a bishop. Such legislation encouraged curiales to pursue an ecclesiastic career since it provided status without making burdensome financial demands. Towards the end of Constantine's life, his biographer, Eusebius, complained of the numbers of people who had come into the church for the wrong reasons, and who counterfeited a faith for the sake of convenience and advancement (*Life of Constantine* 4.54.2).



Figure 10.4 The Curia, or Senate house, in Rome. Photo Bill Leadbetter.

A new dynasty

When Constantine became a Christian, he encouraged his immediate family to do likewise. Eusebius reports that he persuaded his mother Helena to embrace the faith (*Life of Constantine* 3.47); his eldest son, Crispus, received a Christian tutor (Jerome, *De viris illustribus* [On Famous Men] 80). At some point too, the elderly Eutropia, widow of Maximian, became a Christian (Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.4.6). Constantine's younger sons were all raised as Christians; his half-brothers and their families likewise. Indeed, Constantine trusted his half-brother Flavius Dalmatius to hear the murder charges brought against Athanasius in 333 (Socrates, Schol. 1.27.19–21). Another half-brother, Julius Constantius was married to the Christian lady Basilina (Vogt 1963: 50f.). Their son Julian received a Christian education, as did his older half-brother, Constantius Gallus. Of Constantine's half-sisters, Constantia was a pious lady who favoured the Arians, and apparently was a source of advice to them at Nicaea (Pohlsander 1993).

The vigour with which Constantine's family embraced the faith ensured that it would be passed on to the next generation. Constantine's sons were all pious men who sought to play their parts in church affairs; likewise the daughters of the next generation, Eusebia, Constantina and Helena. Of his surviving nephews, Gallus remained devout; Julian, who despised his family, rejected their faith.

A new aristocracy

The imperial family stood at the apex of the social pyramid of the empire. Immediately below them came the families of the senatorial aristocracy of Rome (and later of Constantinople as well), and the curial families of the empire's cities. The aristocracy of the city of Rome proved most resistant to religious change (Arnheim 1972: 50f.) Notable individuals certainly did convert to Christianity (Alföldi 1948: 118f.), although not in great numbers. A more subtle influence has, however, been discerned.

If the public men of the Roman aristocracy clung to their traditions, the women who bore and married them did not. There is good evidence that, at least from the beginning of the fourth century, Christianity gained a firm footing in the households of the aristocracy from the increasing adherence of aristocratic women (Brown 1961). They became the patrons and supporters of the church. Moreover, such patronage and support was increasingly solicited by clergy. Pope Damasus (366–384) was nicknamed 'the ear-tickler' from his frequent attendance upon such potential donors (*Collectio Avellana* 1.10). Indeed, by 370, the emperors had written to Pope Damasus forbidding clerics to dance attendance upon widows and female wards, and from privately receiving testamentary bequests from their estates (*Codex Theodosianus* [*Theodosian Code*] 16.2.20). Although many leading Roman aristocrats retained an ostentatious devotion to the gods of tradition, towards the end of the century their religious allegiance had become a matter of dispute. Ambrose claimed that most members of the senatorial class were Christian (*Epistles* 17.9; 18.31); the later pagan historian Zosimus that they were followers of the old religion (*New History* 4.39).

The Roman aristocracy, however, were only briefly of more than symbolic importance in the political affairs of the late empire. The locus of power had shifted from Rome long before. In 330, Constantine dedicated a new city for the empire which he called 'New Rome'. Later called Constantinople after its founder, it became the regular residence of Roman emperors in the East. Constantine not only adorned it with stolen art treasures, but also with a senatorial class of its own. It has been asserted that when this class was recruited, preference was given to Christian curiales (Alföldi 1948: 115). There is some evidence to support this. One of its first luminaries, Flavius Ablabius, was a Christian. Honoratus, the first urban prefect of Constantinople, was entrusted by Constantius II with the arbitration of ecclesiastical disputes (Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.4.1; Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.23.3). The Christianity of members of this class may not have run especially deep. Domitius Modestus, who succeeded Honoratus as urban prefect, was a Christian under Constantius, a pagan under Julian, and an Arian Christian under Valens (Jones *et al.*, 1971: 608). It can, however, be stated with some confidence that, as in Rome, by the end of the century the Constantinopolitan elite was largely Christian, and perhaps for the same reasons (Liebeschuetz 1990: 140–5).

Bishops, monks and nuns

A new elite was also emerging parallel to the senatorial class. In the world of traditional, polytheistic religion official priestly tasks had always been performed by the city *curiales*. Only in rare cases did individual cults have a dedicated priesthood; otherwise the social and spiritual worlds of classical cities were profoundly integrated. The sectarian origins of Christianity, however, mandated a different kind of clerisy, one which existed separate from and parallel to secular society. Accordingly, in its first three centuries, the church generated its own authority structure, one forced to define itself in the context of debates with the heterodox. The authority of the bishop was divine, imparted from the apostles at the moment of consecration through the laying on of hands (Clement, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 44.1–5).

The bishop had always acted as a monarch within his own community. When those communities were small and marginal, the realm of episcopal power was tiny indeed. As the power and the scope of the church grew, so did that of its rulers. While it is impossible to quantify the number of people who identified as Christians after 312, the qualitative evidence suggests that increasing numbers of ordinary folk were becoming Christians (Brown 1978: 57f.; Frend 1984: 434–52). Such people looked to their bishops and clergy as sources of more than ecclesiastical authority.

This was a process which was given impetus by the progressive privileging of the church in the legislation of Constantine and Constantius II. An early law of Constantine's empowered bishops to superintend the manumission of slaves (*Code of Justinian* 1.13.1); another awarded legal competence to episcopal courts, even as courts of appeal on secular matters (*Theodosian Code* 1.27.1). Although later laws refined the juridical role of the bishop, the fact of episcopal courts was thereafter not in dispute (Hunt 1993: 151–4). Such a civic function could only enhance the role of the bishop as an ecclesiastical aristocrat. Great sees became the focus of intense competition between ambitious clergy (MacMullen 1990: 266f.). In 366, the rivalry

between two claimants for the see of Rome led to violence and massacre (Ammianus Marcellinus 27.3.12–15). For most of Athanasius' tenure of the see of Alexandria he had to contend with a rival bishop, often one with the support of the emperor (Barnes 1993: 19). The prize was worth it. Bishops of great sees, like Athanasius and Ambrose, could dare to lecture emperors.

On a less elevated level, such bishops controlled the purse-strings of charity. As patrons of the poor, they assumed a peculiar burden of euergetism which brought them an enhanced civic status (Brown 1992: 90–103). Yet their ecclesiastical authority did not go unchallenged.

Simultaneous with the privileging of the formal rulers of the church, there arose the less formal, and more charismatic, spiritual elite of holy men and women. Even before the victory of Constantine Christians had withdrawn into the desert to pursue an ascetic and individual holiness. In both Syria and Egypt in particular, the wildernesses became richly peopled with those who rejected the blandishments of civil life in favour of a rigorously applied pursuit of the divine (Chitty 1966). For local communities blessed with the propinquity of such a holy person, there was a ready-made arbiter of disputes. For obdurate pagans, here was a spiritual athlete to whom surrender was no disgrace (Brown 1971; 1995: 55–78).

A new army

Alongside the aristocracy, the other key institution of the Roman empire is the Roman army. From the very beginning, it was used as a tool of the religious policies of Constantine and his successors. The prayers which Constantine mandated for his soldiers before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge and those he spoke to his God during the war with Licinius turned civil wars into holy wars, and armies from instruments of policy to instruments of the divine will. Constantine ensured that his troops were not denied access to the divine. In his own field army, he had a tent set aside for his own private devotions. As time went on, it became a mobile chapel with a staff of clergy who functioned as military chaplains (Jones 1953; Helgoland 1978: 813f.). Moreover, he mandated Sunday as a festal day for his soldiers (Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 4.18–19), and gave preference in promotion to Christian officers (Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 4.52).

The army, however, was not a particularly malleable institution. Many legionaries, recruited principally from rural areas, clung to their ancestral cults and did not so readily embrace change (Jones 1963: 23f.; Macmullen 1984: 45–9). A culture of tolerance had long existed within the army, which enabled the recalcitrant many to remain unchallenged within their traditions. The soldiers were nevertheless reminded of the religious convictions of the emperors for whom they fought every time they received their pay. Soon after Constantine's victory over Licinius, the figure of the deity *Sol Invictus* disappeared from Constantine's coinage. With some minor exceptions, this ended the routine appearance of deities on the coinage, and thereafter Christian motifs predominated – although somewhat ambiguously to begin with (Bruun 1958, 1962; 1966: 61–4).

By the time Julian came to proclaim his own paganism in 351 CE, the army was, at least superficially, Christian. While he could claim, in a letter to the theurgist

Maximus, that most of the troops with him were faithful to the gods (*Letter* 38), those troops were from Gaul, a region of the empire far less touched by Christian missionary activity. There were far more Christians in the Eastern legions whom he came to command after the death of Constantius II, and whom he needed to accustom to the new religious policy (Jones 1963: 25). In some cases, this involved soldiers in a conflict between orders and convictions. Two standard-bearers refused to remove the *Labarum* from the standards of their legions, or to perform sacrifices, and were beheaded for their obstinacy (Bowersock 1978: 107). Julian's death in 363 CE ended his zeal for the traditional gods; the blandishments which he had offered to military apostates vanished. The superficial Christianity of the soldiery reasserted itself but, although 20 years later the Christian writer Jerome could claim that although the Christian insignia emblazoned the banners of the army, pagan officers and men continued to serve under them (Tomlin 1998).

Amongst the army's senior commanders, whose religious allegiance is more identifiable than that of rank and file legionaries, there is evidence that Julian encouraged pagan generals, although not to the exclusion of Christians. Christian tradition claims that the later emperor Valentinian, then a tribune, was punished for clinging to his faith (see Jones *et al.* 1971: 933). This must be dismissed as a pious fiction (Nixon 1997). Certainly Christian generals who had served under Constantius retained their rank and duties under Julian, most notably Arintheus and Victor, who actively participated in the conclave of generals after Julian's death (Ammianus Marcellinus 25.5.2). There were certainly many other Christians holding senior ranks within the army by the death of Constantius, and Julian's policies did nothing to vitiate this.

Following the death of Julian in 363 CE, the non-Christian officers who had reached prominence under his rule, by and large, retained that prominence. His household commander, Dagalaifus, went on to hold commands under Valentinian, and even to serve a consulship in 366 (Jones *et al.* 1971: 239). One of Julian's closest advisers, Salutius Secundus, was both a prominent pagan and, following Julian's death, proposed as his successor by the conclave of officers (Ammianus Marcellinus 25.5.3). He refused the offer, and continued to hold office under Jovian and Valentinian (Jones *et al.* 1971: 814–817). The Manichaean Sebastianus held commands under Constantius II, Julian, Valentinian and Valens (Tomlin 1998: 37). Perhaps the most famous military pagan was Ammianus Marcellinus, *miles quondam et Graecus*, who had served under both Constantius II and Julian. By the beginning of the fifth century, most of the army's senior officers were Christians, although with egregious exceptions like Arbogast, Fravitta and Generid (Jones 1963: 25; Tomlin 1998).

A new emperor

Intrinsic to the process of change which was occurring in the core institutions of the Roman world was a change in the understanding of the role of the emperor and, indeed, the empire itself. This was especially the case for Christians who were struggling to incorporate empire and emperor into a world-view which had, for three centuries, excluded or demonized them. Christian writers like Lactantius symbolize the dilemma. Converted while Christianity was barely tolerated, he fled from

Diocletian's persecution but prospered under Constantine. His writings reveal a growing conviction of the providential role of the Roman empire, and the divine sanction exercised by its Christian emperor (Leadbetter 1998a).

As priests and rulers, the emperors of Rome had always acted as guarantors of the happy relationship between the Romans and their gods. It was in pursuit of this that such vigorous asserters of tradition as Decius, Valerian and Diocletian had assaulted the church (Leadbetter 1996). The immediate impact upon the imperial office of Constantine's conversion was in his immediate exercise of religious authority, both in seeking to settle disputes within the church and in aggressively promoting Christianity to those outside its bosom. This had its own consequences both for Constantine's perception of his own role as Christian emperor, and also for Christian understandings of what the empire was, and its place in human history.

To begin with, a new theology of power was mandated. In his writings on Constantine, Eusebius of Caesarea provided an influential and coherent model. In a speech in praise of his hero, Eusebius portrayed the emperor as the earthly counterpart of the divine logos, just as monarchy was the earthly counterpart of monotheism (*In Praise of Constantine* 2–5). God rewards the pious sovereign, whose earthly authority is the mirror-image of God's heavenly rule (Baynes 1934; Fowden 1993: 87–9). Eusebius' speech was measured, and at times ambiguous. He used language which was at once acceptable to both Christian listeners and those who adhered to their traditional cults (Drake 1975: 57). The new Christian emperor was, at least initially, not far removed from his predecessors. It was left to his successors to make the Christian implications overt and explicit.

There was, however, an implication which could readily be drawn. If God rewarded the pious emperor and, through him, the empire, then it was especially incumbent upon the emperor to be devoted to true religion. Religious controversialists like Athanasius and political bishops like Ambrose exploited this chink in the imperial armour in pursuit of their ecclesiastical objectives. The Arian but able Constantius II was reviled as Antichrist and persecutor (Barnes 1993: 106); the impeccably Catholic Theodosius I nevertheless suffered the censure of Ambrose for sanctioning atrocities (Ambrose, *Epistle* 41, 51; Matthews 1975: 232–6).

For Constantine, however, there was a missionary edge to his role as God's vicegerent. It was, naturally enough, the task of the pious emperor to make the whole earth Christian. Constantine famously claimed to be the 'bishop of those outside the Church'. That included those outside the empire as well, and in his later years Constantine developed links with the Christians of Persia while he prepared to launch what amounted to a holy war upon their Zoroastrian rulers (Barnes 1985; Fowden 1993: 93–8). While Constantine's successors did not necessarily share his zeal for missionary imperialism, they were all compelled to assume an egregious piety. None could ignore Christian controversy. The empire was now God's land.

This Christianized ideology of empire and emperor, for which Christians themselves almost sacrificed their eschatological expectations (Markus 1990: 89f.) proved enormously solid and coherent. Indeed, it survived the end of the western empire in Europe, inspiring its medieval successor-states, and persisted and prospered in the Byzantine world for another thousand years. In many respects it remains one of the more enduring legacies of Constantine's conversion.

A new landscape

One factor which enabled this new ideology of empire and emperor to prosper was its incorporation into the rhythms of everyday life. By the end of the fourth century, Jerome could claim that Christian basilicas were richly peopled with worshippers, while the temples of the old gods provided shelter only for owls and spiders (Epistle 107; see Tomlin 1998: 21). While such a claim was more rhetorical than real, it does underscore the fact that a new and profoundly Christian sense of place was emerging.

This is especially evident in the part played in civic life by the dead. In the classical city, the dead had been removed from the city. Cemeteries were outside the walls; the remains which were housed there contaminated those who touched them (Brown 1981: 1–22). To Christians, however, graves were holy places; the corpses of the martyrs conferred merit. Even before the legalization of Christianity, the tombs of the martyrs had become the centres of worship, and their mortal remains had become sacred relics. Around them grew up individual cults, as a more generalized cult of the saints emerged. As the reach of Christianity grew, it even became necessary to export the sanctity of the relics to new church communities (Markus 1990: 94f.).

When Constantine and his successors came to act as patrons of the church, many of the grand new houses of worship which they constructed were over the tombs of such saints. In Rome, St Peter, St Paul and St Lawrence were honoured with great basilicas. These new cathedrals in Rome, and elsewhere, shifted the balance of civic life. Traditional religion had been incorporated into the physical and moral centre of the city. Christianity shifted this focus to the urban fringes.

Moreover, even beyond those fringes, the villages and towns of the countryside could boast the sanctity either of their own martyrs (domestic or imported) or the presence of holy people. It was not only the martyred dead whose touch and prayer could confer sanctity. Holy men and women, prayerful ascetics, whether in community or alone, provided an inescapable and tangible mediation between sinful humanity and the eternal Kingdom of God. Where once hills and groves had been holy places, now it was islands, caves, or even pillars.

Beyond the fringes of the immediate, there was also a land which became imbued with its own sanctity. Palestine, where Christianity began and where so many of the stories of the Bible are set, became *terra sancta* – ‘the Holy Land’. Christians had long been attracted to it (Hunt 1982: 4; Wilken 1992: 108f.). Now they came from the highest echelons. First, Constantine’s mother Helena, who recovered the True Cross and founded churches at Bethlehem and the Mount of Olives (Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 3.41); his mother-in-law too visited the holy places, complaining of the paganism rife at Mamre (Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 3.51). Wealthy pilgrims who could afford the costs of travel and the months away from home came by ship and road, from the ends of the empire, and even from outside it. They came to partake in the land of the Bible (Hunt 1982: 50–82). Some even came to stay. Jerome settled in Bethlehem while his arch-rival Rufinus made his home in Jerusalem.

This new geography of holiness formed a new and complex Christian matrix of places and travellers (Markus 1990: 151–5). Constantine’s new churches rose as defunded temples fell into desuetude. Below the church altars lay the relics of the

martyred heroes of Christian mythology whose sanctity was shared by local and pilgrim alike. The countryside too was populated with living martyrs – holy men and women, simultaneously in and outside the world. This form of Christianization does much to explain the tenacity with which Christianity clung to the eminence which it had achieved when under challenge by a pagan revival.

THE PERSISTENCE OF PAGANISM

Introduction

Constantine, for all his efforts to promote Christianity, did not convert the empire. Traditional religion could not be so easily discarded, and it is clear that, while many eagerly embraced the new faith, many others were energized to the defence of tradition and the reassertion of its values. The strength of traditional religion in the army has already been discussed, but it was only one of several institutions in which paganism persisted with grim vigour. Philosophers of the old school, the senatorial aristocracy, municipal elites and the peasantry maintained their traditions tenaciously, often in the face of overt hostility from the government. Even so, for a brief moment the reign of Julian gave pagans hope that devastated temples might be restored, and that traditional cults might be returned to the centre of the social and civic life of the empire.

Julian (c. 331–63 CE) and the survival of paganism

Julian's career illustrates both the strength of pagan survival and also its weakness. Born in Constantinople into the Christian imperial family, Julian was also, from an early age, the victim of its politics. His father, eldest bother, uncles and cousins were slaughtered in the 'promiscuous massacre' which marked the accession of Constantine's sons, and he and his brother Gallus were brought up at isolated properties in an atmosphere of superstition and fear. Julian's rejection of his family's Christianity was a personal one, made fairly early in his life (Browning 1976: 40–7; MacMullen 1984: 71). It was, however, made possible by one of the ambiguities of Christianization: the educational syllabus (*paideia*) which a young man was taught remained unchanged. Whether the teacher was Christian or pagan, the core texts remained Homer, Virgil and the classics of traditional literature. Julian had able teachers and access to a vast library. Moreover, as he grew older, he was also able to take advantage of the wisdom of the pagan sophists of Athens.

Pagan intellectuals

Such men had continued to pursue careers in teaching and public service. Constantine and his successors did not cavalierly dispense with the services of able men. There were prominent pagans at the courts of the emperors in senior, if vulnerable, positions. The pagan sophist Sopater enjoyed the patronage of Constantine until brought down by Ablabius, the Christian praetorian prefect (Eunapius, *Lives of the*

Sophists 462–3). Constantius II employed the sophist Eustathius on diplomatic missions (Eunapius, *Lives of the Sophists* 465–6). More than Eustathius, however, the rhetorician Themistius prospered under Constantius II. When Constantius massively expanded the Constantinopolitan Senate from 300 to 2,000 members the task of the expansion was entrusted to him, and it was Themistius who became the principal publicist of Constantius' rule (Vanderspoel 1994).

Yet such men, it is arguable, were quislings, colluding in the marginalization of the religious tradition which they claimed to hold dear. Other intellectuals converted to Christianity through genuine conviction, most notably Firmicus Maternus and Marius Victorinus (Leadbetter 1998a). Others remained hostile to the Constantinian settlement and sought to reverse it. Eunapius, a recusant himself and whose vigorous loathing of Constantine is reflected in the pages of Zosimus' history, compiled a series of brief biographies of such people, all intellectuals (Momigliano 1963: 95–7; Blockley 1981: 1–26). The most noteworthy of these was Libanius, whose lectures in Nicomedia Julian had been forbidden to attend. A rhetorician and Antiochene aristocrat, he not only taught some of the best minds of his age – both Christian and pagan – but also published his correspondence and speeches. He was a warrior for tradition, on one occasion pleading the case for the toleration of traditional worship to Theodosius in the mid-380s. In this speech (*Oration* 30), Libanius pleaded that the temples be protected from Christian vigilantes. He had no kind words to say either about the monks who incited such violence or the bland urban clergy who condoned it. It was a brave speech, made to one who was a bitter foe of his faith.

Such men provided Julian with a cadre of sympathetic intellectuals. They admired him, and praised his policies. He corresponded with them, and they with him. He promoted them and gave them honour. When he died, they mourned his death. Some, like Maximus of Ephesus, paid with their lives for too close an association with power.

The army and administration

Julian found more than the elegant intellectual pagans of Athens. Sent by Constantius to Gaul in order to guard the Rhine frontier, he found kindred spirits amongst the western officer cadre, who later became his own senior commanders. Julian was encouraged by the number of pagans whom he found in the army, a fact which had not been lost on Magnentius, the Gallic usurper who had made Julian's station in the West necessary.

Magnentius had been a senior officer under Constans, when he was co-emperor in the West. A cabal of officers had overthrown Constans in 350, and nominated Magnentius in his place. While Magnentius' personal religious convictions are a matter of some uncertainty, he was far more tolerant of pagan practice (MacMullen 1984: 48; Barnes 1993: 102). He partially reversed the ban on sacrifice, permitting their performance at night (*Theodosian Code* 16.10.5). While this was the policy of a usurper trying to appeal for support to particular interest groups (he also attracted the support of Athanasius), it does indicate that Magnentius considered pagans to be worth courting. Although one stronghold of paganism – the senatorial aristocracy

— is clearly identifiable, such an appeal renders Julian's observation of the strength of western paganism more than wishful.

Certainly after Julian had been proclaimed emperor by his legions in 360 CE, he met many who had worn their Christianity lightly. Pegasius, Bishop of Ilium, had kept the fires of sacrifice burning to the ancient heroes of the Trojan War (Chuvin 1990: 40–2). The aristocrat Domitius Modestus, who had held high office under Constantius, apostatized and was rewarded with the city prefecture of Constantinople; the sophist Hecebolius, who had taught Julian, likewise forswore his faith. Both men returned to the church after Julian's demise (Bowder 1978: 103).

The paganism of the countryside

It is ironic that Julian was so much a man of the aristocracy that he was unable to appeal to traditional paganism where it was strongest. In his great speech on temples to Theodosius, Libanius made it clear that, although the temples had been robbed of their riches, they were still the centre of ritual (*Or.* 30.6), and although sacrifice had been forbidden, people in the countryside continued to celebrate festivals by a communal feast of meat (*Or.* 30.17–19). If Christianity had historically made its greatest impact in the cities, then it had made a commensurately small impact upon the peasant communities of the countryside. In some places, there was a significant Christian presence in rural areas, particularly in North Africa (Jones 1963: 18f.). The Nile valley was another region in which Christianity had a strong presence, and had made significant inroads into the conversion of the countryside (Frankfurter 1998: 265–84).

These are exceptions, however. Much of the countryside of Italy and Gaul was still resolutely pagan, so too was most of the population of Sardinia and, in Palestine, the inhabitants of Gaza (Jones 1963: 18–19; Macmullen 1984: 81; Chuvin 1990: 76–80). In Egypt, theophoric names survived in some numbers amongst the liturgical class (Borkowski 1990), and although Coptic was increasingly employed as a Christian liturgical language, the traditional cults still retained a tenacious hold (Frankfurter 1998: 257–64).

These instances of paganism were not survivals, but continuities. Although Christianity had offered a challenge to traditional belief patterns, many country folk did not take it up and the rhythms of rural life continued as they had for centuries. Such people were not warriors for paganism like Julian or Libanius, but they offered a resistance to Christianity which was more trenchant, more stolid, and more enduring.

The failure of Julian

Julian's early death in 363 CE is only a symbolic marker of his failure. Far more revealing is the reception of the edict of 362 CE in which he forbade Christian rhetoricians from teaching the pagan classics. This drew criticism even from some of his pagan supporters (Ammianus Marcellinus 22.20.7; 25.4.20). The large number of Christian teachers who were now disbarred from practising their profession indicates the strength of Christianity amongst the empire's intellectuals (Jones 1963:

30–1). Indeed, Julian sought (unsuccessfully) to shield Marius Victorinus and Prohaeradius, two of the most prominent. Moreover, Julian drew harsh public criticism from a former classmate, Gregory of Nazianzus, who excoriated Julian in two polemical speeches. After his death, it was one of the first measures to be reversed (Markus 1974: 2–4).

The opposition to this measure indicates just how deeply Christianity had dug itself into the urban and power structures of the empire. Julian's own approach had been to combat this by the promotion of traditional cult in such a form as to make it indistinguishable from Christianity (Chuvin 1990: 46–8; Nicholson 1991). His failure may well have lain in that choice of strategy. Had he embraced the less austere paganism of the peasants, and emphasized festival over ritual, the outcome might have been very different.

PAGANISM IN THE ROMAN ARISTOCRACY

Julian did not directly appeal for support to the senatorial aristocracy of Rome, amongst whom pagan identification was as much a matter of identity as conviction. Some prospered under his rule in any case: Vettius Agorius Praetextatus was appointed to the governorship of Achaëa (Ammianus Marcellinus 22.7.6). Praetextatus held numerous priestly offices and was later depicted as an interlocutor in the pagan dinner party at the heart of Macrobius' *Saturnalia*.² But it can be argued that the gifted Praetextatus would have prospered in any case. He retained his governorship under Valentinian, persuading him not to enforce in Achaëa his edict prohibiting nocturnal sacrifices (Zosimus, *New History* 4.3.3). He subsequently held office as prefect of Rome and praetorian prefect of Italy and Africa.

Praetextatus is, in any event, broadly representative of that class of aristocrats who proudly held multiple priesthoods (Arnheim 1972: 50). These were not merely the traditional priesthoods of Rome, but also new and more exotic offices. Even so, they distinguished between the titles bestowed by ancestral custom and those of private devotion (Matthews 1973).

There were of course exceptions. Some aristocratic families did convert at a comparatively early point. The Anicii, famed for both ancestry and avarice, became Christian during the reign of Constantine (Novak 1979: 291). Others took a little longer, but in 382 it was plausibly claimed that Christian senators were in the majority (Ambrose, *Epistles* 17.10; 18.8ff.). Not all such senators actually attended sessions; many were senators in name only. Of those families which dominated the proceedings and the offices of the fourth-century Senate, however, most were tenaciously and even assertively pagan.

For Constantine's immediate successors, this hardly mattered. Although Constans had been eager to reflect his Christianity through legal enactment (*Theodosian Code* 16.10.1), and perhaps even the spoliation of temples, as urged by the convert Firmicus Maternus (Maternus, *On the Error of Profane Religion* 28.6; Barnes 1993: 102), he left the senatorial aristocracy largely unmolested. Magnentius' policy has already been remarked on, as has Constantius' preference for talent over religious conviction. Indeed, during his visit to Rome in 357, Constantius acceded to the request of a

number of pagan nobles that he nominate successors to the vacancies in a number of priestly colleges (Symmachus, *Relatio* 3.7; Cameron 1968: 98f.). After the death of Julian, Valentinian I came to reign in the West. A soldier-emperor, whose principal task was to ensure the security of the frontiers, Valentinian had been famously tolerant (Ammianus Marcellinus 30.9.5).

GRATIAN, POLITICS AND THE SENATE (375–83 CE)

In 375, Valentinian died of a stroke while berating the envoys of a defeated tribe. He had already taken steps to ensure the succession. The Eastern part of the empire was ruled by his brother Valens; he ruled the West jointly with his own son Gratian. At the time of Valentinian's death, Gratian was still a teenager. His succession was not, however, guaranteed. A cabal of officers nominated his 4-year-old half-brother, Valentinian II, as Augustus. Gratian's acceptance of the nomination prevented conflict and, by virtue of his age, he at least remained the senior partner in the imperial college in the West (Matthews 1975: 64; Sivan 1993: 120).

Gratian's tutor was Ausonius, a rhetor of Gallic origin. Of aristocratic temperament, he was a correspondent of the great pagan senator Symmachus. At the time of Valentinian's death, relations between imperial office and Senate were at a low point. Valentinian had little time for aristocrats, and had preferred to promote men of his own stripe to high office (Alföldi 1952; Matthews 1975: 56–63). The accession of the 16-year-old Gratian brought to power a group of courtly Christians who despised the military caste which had monopolized office under Valentinian. They were aristocrats and intellectuals, who sought to defend the prerogatives of men of their own class. Rapprochement with the alienated Senate was sought; its luminaries praised the accession of Gratian as the dawn of a new age (Matthews 1975: 66–7, and 1989: 273; Sivan 1993: 125f.).

While the emperor remained distant, such was the case. During his first years, Gratian's court was based at distant Trier in the Mosel valley. Offices were held by aristocratic allies and family connections of Ausonius. Dramatic change in the empire, however, intervened. In 378 Gratian's uncle Valens, emperor in the East, was slain in battle with the Goths at Adrianople. Along with Valens died two-thirds of his field army and most of his high command. It was a military disaster of epic proportions, and only the strong walls of the cities of Thrace prevented the Gothic force from consolidating their victory (Ammianus Marcellinus 31.13; 15–16). The emergency mandated a firm response from Gratian, now senior ruler. His appointment of Theodosius, first as the military commander to deal with the crisis, and then as Augustus in the East, may well reflect the advice of senior senators not of the circle of Ausonius (Matthews 1975: 93–8; see too the different, but less satisfactory explanation offered by Sivan 1993: 121f.). Although the ascendancy of the Gallic rhetor was waning, he slipped from power with a degree of dignity. Other men were coming to the fore, and they would change the policy of the malleable young ruler.

In 381, the imperial court settled at Milan, in proximity to the city's remarkable bishop, Ambrose (see Chapter 47 of this volume for a detailed profile). In his earliest years, Ambrose was a warrior for Nicene orthodoxy against the strong community of

Arians in north Italy. In 378, the bishop dedicated the first volume of his polemic against Arianism to Gratian, and sought to win him as a partisan. Like Ausonius, Ambrose was an aristocrat. His father had been praetorian prefect in Gaul under Constantine II, and he may have been executed after Constantine's defeat (Jones *et al.* 1971: 51, n. 1). Ambrose himself had risen steadily through a series of administrative offices, largely with the support of the great Christian senator, Petronius Probus, who approved the sudden and unexpected election of Ambrose as bishop of Milan in 374 (Paulinus, *Life of Ambrose* 2.3–5; 8).

Despite the similarity of their backgrounds, the approaches of Ambrose and Ausonius to religious matters were diametrically opposed. Ausonius was a man more at home in the classical world than the austere Christian one; the corpus of his literary work reveals a man thoroughly engaged with classical culture. Ambrose by contrast was a warrior engaged in spiritual and political combat with Arianism, and who consistently sought to involve the imperial office as a partisan for orthodoxy (Rousseau 1996).

Early in 380, Ambrose was invited to instruct Gratian in matters of faith. From this point on, the young emperor became increasingly inclined to intervene in religious matters. This intervention was initially in defence of Christian orthodoxy, but Gratian then turned his attention to the pagan symbols of Rome. In so doing, he launched the first determined assault on the paganism of the leaders of the aristocracy. Amongst his decisions were the removal of state subsidies for traditional priestly cults (including the Vestal Virgins, who now lost their government-funded allowances), the removal of the statue of Victory in the Senate house, and (critically) his repudiation of the title of Pontifex Maximus which had been borne by all emperors since Augustus (*Theodosian Code* 16.10.20; Zosimus, *New History* 4.36; Cameron 1968).

In assuming this interventionist policy, Gratian was consciously rejecting the broad policy of tolerance which had marked the reigns of Constantius II, Valentinian, and his own earlier years. Other emperors had tampered with these symbols, but not permanently: Constantius II had removed the Altar of Victory from the Senate House (Symmachus, *Relatio* 3.4), a deed which was reversed by Julian. Furthermore, Gratian was disinclined to hear appeals, even from distinguished pagan senators, for a return to tolerance. On several occasions, Symmachus sought an audience with the emperor, but was refused (Symmachus, *Relatio* 3.2). The abandonment of the title of Pontifex Maximus was especially significant. The office had been a vestige of the pagan empire. As Alan Cameron has remarked (1968: 97), once the title had been rejected by a Christian emperor, it could not be employed again. Moreover, the cessation of state subsidies for pagan religion (of more immediate concern to Symmachus) could never, for the same reason, be restored. Thus paganism was finally disestablished, although that achievement was not confirmed until the final victory of Theodosius at the Frigidus in 395.

THEODOSIUS AND THE TRIUMPH OF CATHOLIC ORTHODOXY

Introduction

Gratian was overthrown in 383. It was a military conspiracy; his murderers were all Christians, and their nominee was the aggressively orthodox Magnus Maximus. An officer of Spanish origin, Maximus had served with his fellow Spaniard Theodosius the Elder in Britain in 368 (Ammianus Marcellinus 27.8.1ff.). Again he served under Theodosius in the suppression of the usurper Firmus in Africa (Ammianus Marcellinus 29.5.6). Much of his subsequent career is uncertain until his appointment by Gratian to a senior military command in Britain (Jones *et al.* 1971: 588). It was from Britain that he rebelled, seizing the British, Spanish and Gallic provinces while the 13-year-old Valentinian II held the Balkans, Italy and Africa.

Maximus' usurpation did not immediately split the empire. Theodosius gave him grudging recognition and Maximus gave no immediate indication of designs upon Valentinian II's portion of power. Remaining in the North with his court in Trier, he concentrated upon the imperial duty of guarding the Gallic provinces, a duty he performed well enough. Thus, a new balance was briefly struck.

Emperors and heretics

The accession of Theodosius, together with the more interventionist policies of Gratian, marks a new stage in the intervention of the emperor in ecclesiastical disputation. Although Constantius II and Valens had been involved in the Arian controversy, neither emperor had actually moved to criminalize what they perceived to be heresy. Political bishops like Athanasius had suffered exile, but no law mandated any view as orthodox and obligatory. Each member of the imperial college ruling in the generation after Adrianople was obliged to make a decision about the direction of religious policy and the relations between church and state. Curiously, the rulings of each are similar in intent and in tenor. Gratian's interventionist dealings with the pagan aristocracy of Rome have already been discussed. Of his contemporaries and successors, Magnus Maximus sought to resolve the Priscillianist heresy; Valentinian II was obliged to confront the senatorial aristocracy; Theodosius sought to bring the long-running Arian schism to an end.

Magnus Maximus and the Priscillianists

In 379, Gratian had issued an edict in which he formally reiterated the prohibition on heresy, and expressed the pious wish that it would everywhere cease. Beyond this, however, he would not go (*Theodosian Code* 16.5.5). As such, Gratian was following a policy set by his predecessors: taking a position, encouraging a view, but not compelling through force. Some have seen here the influence of his new colleague Theodosius (Liebeschuetz 1990: 157), although the hand of Ambrose is more plausibly detected.

When Maximus took Gratian's place he took his own advice, and that of less

subtle church politicians. When a controversy arose, his intervention went far beyond that of Gratian.

A Spanish nobleman, Priscillian, was a new convert to Christianity in the 370s. Independently minded, he formulated a distinct theology much of which is still unclear. What is evident is that his views were egalitarian, ascetic, and bore affinities to Gnosticism (Frend 1984: 711–13; Matthews 1975: 161–70; Chadwick 1976). Priscillian's views proved extremely popular amongst the aristocratic communities of Gaul and Spain, and thus provided the movement with a wealthy and literate laity. In 380 an ecclesiastical council in Saragossa condemned some Priscillianist teachings, but not the man himself. Ecclesiastical enemies pursued him and his associates. Priscillian, consecrated bishop of Avila in 381, fled Spain and sought support in Gaul and northern Italy (Frend 1984: 712). Gratian responded by formally exiling all heretics 'from the face of the earth' (Sulpicius Severus, *Chronicle* 2.47.6; Matthews 1975: 163). Priscillian and his followers failed to disappear as ordered and, instead, went on a missionary tour in southern Gaul and Italy. Although they were not received by either Pope Damasus or Ambrose, they were able to lobby Macedonius, the Master of Offices (Sulpicius Severus, *Chronicle* 2.48.5; 49.3). He procured official toleration for the Priscillianists who, thus armed with government support, returned to Spain in triumph. Their chief persecutors, most notably Ithacius, bishop of Ossonoba, fled from Spain.

At this point, however, the government changed. Gratian was overthrown; Magnus Maximus succeeded to the relevant provinces. Eager to proclaim his religious affiliation, he had received baptism soon after his proclamation, a matter which he stressed in an extant letter to Pope Siricius (*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 35.90–1; Matthews 1975: 165; Nixon 1987: 83). The exiled Ithacius hastened to Maximus' court to elicit supportive action. Maximus called a council at Bordeaux which re-anathematized Priscillianism. Priscillian appealed directly to the emperor. Ithacius emerged as his prosecutor, and he succeeded in obtaining a sentence of death. Maximus did not intervene, and as a consequence Priscillian and a number of his supporters were executed (Sulpicius Severus, *Chronicle* 2.50.7). Others were exiled.

The executions were not accomplished naively. Maximus was fully aware of what they portended. He defended himself to the Pope by asserting that he was a defender of the church, and the executions had been performed in accordance with that duty; that the Priscillianists had not been Christians, but Manichaeans; and that his action had prevented schism (*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 35.90–1). Such sentiments may have been sincerely held. In any event, Maximus attracted less opprobrium for the deed at the time than did the accusing bishops. Pacatus, a later panegyrist of Theodosius, called them 'thugs and butchers'; milder but no less determined language was employed elsewhere (Nixon 1987: 82). Whether Maximus was led astray by wicked bishops or not, the genie was out of the bottle; Christians had been executed by Christians for holding heterodox views.

Valentinian II and the Altar of Victory

After the death of Gratian, the 13-year-old Valentinian II had come to live in Milan. The principal figure at his court was his formidable, and Arian, mother Justina. In 384 not long after their arrival in the city, a despatch was received from the courtly and eloquent Aurelius Symmachus, prefect of Rome. In it, Symmachus reported a resolution of the Senate which had asked for the restoration of the Altar of Victory to the Senate House. He supported that resolution wholeheartedly, and the letter (Symmachus, *Relation* 3) is an eloquent plea for pluralism, tolerance, and a bold assertion of the historic value of traditional religion to the empire.

Symmachus' arguments were anticipated by Ambrose who wrote to the emperor (Ambrose, *Epistle* 17), reminding him that paganism had never been so tolerant, and exhorting him to act as a Christian emperor and follow the high precepts established by Gratian. Upon receipt of Symmachus' petition, Ambrose wrote another letter to Valentinian (*Epistle* 18) in which he responded to Symmachus' arguments. Drawing on the familiar language of Christian anti-pagan polemic, Ambrose ridiculed traditional paganism and reminded his audience of the persecution of the church. Moreover, asserted Ambrose, the meeting of the Senate which had passed the resolution supported by Symmachus had been packed with pagans; the majority of senators were in fact Christian.

The debate was a polite one. The polemic was no more than a rhetorical device which both combatants knew well. Valentinian rejected Symmachus' request. Gratian's policy was not reversed. The elegant plea for tolerance fell on deaf ears. Instead, Valentinian heeded Ambrose's exhortations to be a 'Christian monarch', as Gratian had done before him.

The dispute, moreover, strengthened the hand of Ambrose in his long-standing dispute with Justina over religious policy. She continued to assert her patronage of Arianism in the West. To Ambrose, Justina was Jezebel (*Epistle* 20.18), but she was nevertheless successful, in 386, in securing a decree enabling the Arian congregations to meet (*Theodosian Code* 16.4.1). This resulted in a confrontation between bishop and empress, in which Ambrose and his congregants took over a basilica which the Arians had sought to occupy (Ambrose, *Epistle* 20). Ambrose's carefully deployed display of public support induced Justina to back down. Ambrose followed up with an orthodox offensive. Skeletons were providentially discovered and identified as the relics of the martyred soldier saints Protasius and Gervasius (Ambrose, *Epistle* 22). In a grand public display of piety, the relics were reverentially gathered up and transported to Milan's grand new basilica. The victory of Milanese orthodoxy was complete (see further details in Chapter 47 of this volume).

Theodosius, the Catholic church and the *Cunctos populos* decree of 380 CE

Theodosius had come to power in order to cope with a military crisis. He was also a devout Catholic Christian who had no doubt as to the merits of his faith. Almost as soon as he had taken power he nailed his colours to the mast (Liebeschuetz 1990: 157; Williams and Friell 1994: 53). In February 380 he issued an edict known by its

first two words as '*Cunctos populos*' ('All Peoples'; *Theodosian Code* 16.1.2). This law mandated Catholic Christianity (as exemplified by the doctrines held by the bishop of Rome) as the one true authentic faith. The law ordered all Christians to hold to Catholic orthodoxy, abandoning all other Christian groups which were adjudged mad and incoherent and forbidden to call themselves 'churches'.

This drastic intervention was not without risk. Arianism was numerically far stronger than Nicene orthodoxy in the East. Theodosius had prepared carefully (Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 7.4; Liebeschuetz 1990: 158), and was satisfied that his opposition was sufficiently divided to be ineffectual. In any event, as Sozomen notes, he sought through this edict to declare his intention of leading the empire to orthodoxy, not compelling it (*Hist. Eccles.* 7.4). Nevertheless, the edict was not received well in Constantinople; there was rioting, and Theodosius was compelled to enter the city and expel the Arian clergy (Sozomen, *Hist. Eccles.* 7.5–7). The installation of the fiercely Nicene Gregory Nazianzus as Patriarch of Constantinople could only be enforced through the deployment of soldiers.

Theodosius then tried a new strategy. On 10 January 381 he issued a law which named the heresies which he branded as pestilential and sacrilegious: the Photinians, the Arians and the Eunomians (*Theodosian Code* 16.5.6). Those who adhered to these perfidious assemblies were to be denied the name and privileges of church; persistent offenders were to be driven from the towns where their folly had been made manifest. Theodosius was, inexorably, moving to a position where Catholic, or Nicene, Christianity, was enshrined in law and other doctrinal systems were outlawed.

Theodosius also saw the merits in reasserting the theology of Nicaea. A new ecumenical council was called to meet in Constantinople in May 381. This council marked the formal victory of Trinitarianism over Arianism. An amended version of the Nicene Creed was adopted – the one substantially still in use today. The critical importance of the Council of Constantinople was that it enabled orthodoxy (as it became) to refine itself since, henceforth, the Creed which it produced became the touchstone of all that was doctrinally proper.

The Council marked the acceleration of the legislative campaign against heresy. As the year progressed, the measures became more harsh. In July, heretics (and Arians were here again named) were forbidden to build buildings for assembly. Should any attempt be made to do so, they would be confiscated to the treasury (*Theodosian Code* 16.5.8). Less than two weeks later, Theodosius ordered the expulsion of all heretical clergy and bishops, and their replacement by orthodox churchmen (*Theodosian Code* 16.1.3). Within the context of this law, Catholic orthodoxy was not defined by the teaching of the bishop of Rome (who had not been present at Constantinople) but as those with whom the bishops of Constantinople, Alexandria, Laodicea, Tarsus, Iconium, Pisidian Antioch, Cappadocian Caesarea, Melitene, Nyssa, Scythia and Marcianopolis – all Eastern sees. Theodosius had no intention of allowing the definition of orthodoxy to slip through his fingers.

Theodosius' drastic proscription of Arianism had the desired effect. Deprived of the sustenance of its communities, and the ability of its leaders to organize, it withered. Theodosius had taken the initiative and sought to do more than encourage people to believe as he did. He sought to mandate it, since he saw no virtue in pluralism.

Theodosius and Ambrose

In 387, Magnus Maximus sought to extend his authority by driving Valentinian II out of Italy. Initially successful, the young emperor fled with his mother to Theodosius. A war of reconquest was planned and, in 388, carried out. After a difficult war against one who was his own kind, Theodosius captured and executed Maximus. That brought Theodosius to Milan by 10 October 388, where he issued a law to cancel the acts and decisions of Maximus (*Theodosian Code* 15.14.7).

In Milan he made the acquaintance of Ambrose, whose views on empire and imperial authority were very similar to his own. Yet the two came into conflict very swiftly, as set out in detail in Chapter 47 of this volume. Some Christians, with the encouragement of their bishop, had burned down a synagogue in the Mesopotamian town of Callinicum. Forced destruction of pagan monuments by the authorities was one thing; vigilante evangelism, another. Theodosius' response was to order the rebuilding of the synagogue at the bishop's expense, a decision he later amended to make the entire congregation liable (Ambrose, *Epistles* 40, 41).

Ambrose protested the ruling, but to little effect. He therefore made his displeasure public in a sermon in which he compared Theodosius to King David and himself to the prophet Nathan (Ambrose, *Epistle* 41). The implication was plain. Nathan had condemned David over his taking of Bathsheba; Ambrose claimed the same right of moral guardianship. He then proclaimed a kind of episcopal strike, refusing to celebrate Mass until the emperor had reversed his policy. Theodosius accepted Ambrose's terms, and, by implication, his right to dictate them.

In the following year, another confrontation occurred over a far bloodier provocation (see Chapter 47 for further details). The assassination of a garrison commander in Thessalonica had been followed by a massacre of citizenry in retaliation (Sozomen, *Hist. Eccles.* 7.25). On hearing the news, Ambrose had been stunned and sickened (Ambrose, *Epistle* 51). Ambrose, who had remained aloof from court politics, could not refrain from protest (Matthews 1975: 235). He wrote to Theodosius, stating quite simply that he would be unavailable to celebrate Mass if the emperor were in the congregation. This was not a formal excommunication, but it had the same result. Theodosius was obliged to do public penance and through his humility, and humiliation, satisfy Ambrose of his contrition. The emperor was in no position to ignore his bishop. In a sense, Theodosius was a prisoner of his own orthodoxy, bound to heed episcopal authority. Ambrose, for his part, was not so much seeking power for its own sake as exercising the same theology of power which had led him to advise Gratian and Valentinian II (Rousseau 1996).

Theodosius and paganism

Theodosius' approach to paganism was more inclusive. Although he reiterated his opposition to sacrifice in an edict of December 381 (*Theodosian Code* 16.10.7), he was prepared to extend a measure of generosity to traditional believers (Williams and Friell 1994: 57). In 384, Themistius was appointed urban prefect of Constantinople, and entrusted with the care of Theodosius' young son Arcadius during Theodosius' absence in the West (Jones *et al.* 1971: 892). Similarly, when Theodosius went to the

West to deal with Magnus Maximus, he left two pagans, Tatianus and Proculus, in senior offices of responsibility (Matthews 1975: 224; Williams and Friell 1994: 62). This policy does not so much reflect a preference for pagans, but a general recognition that paganism was now a disqualification for imperial office. Like eunuchs, and like the court Jews of a later period, they could perform valuable and sensitive service for their masters without the apprehension of higher ambition. A famous relief from an obelisk in Constantinople shows Theodosius surrounded by his courtiers and soldiers (see Figure 10.5). In Rome itself, when he visited the city in 389, he honoured many of the pagan luminaries of the Senate, even restoring to favour the prolix Aurelius Symmachus who had made the mistake of supporting Magnus Maximus (Matthews 1975: 227–31).

Theodosius' court pagans, and the favoured pagan senatorial aristocracy, were in a precarious position, however. Their security depended upon the emperor's pleasure, and that seems to have dried up soon after the Thessalonica incident. Perhaps his public penance reminded him all too forcibly of his own conviction of the church as the sole mediator of human salvation (Bloch 1963: 198). In February 391, Theodosius issued a law formally banning all pagan practice, and prescribing monetary penalties for those of the administrative class and above (*Theodosian Code* 16.10.10). His new approach to paganism was marked by anti-pagan riots. In one of these, at Alexandria, the Serapeum, one of the grandest and most venerable shrines of Late Antique paganism, and the home of a magnificent library, was destroyed by a Christian mob (Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 472).



Figure 10.5 Theodosius with his courtiers and soldiers, from an obelisk in Constantinople.
Photo Bill Leadbetter.

In the face of this outright condemnation and intolerance, the senatorial aristocracy can only have felt impotent. Their only alternative recourse was the young emperor Valentinian II, ruling from the town of Vienne. Valentinian was completely dominated by Arbogast, his Master of the Soldiers (Jones *et al.* 1971: 96). In 392, Valentinian sought to exercise his authority and dismiss Arbogast from his post. Arbogast's response was to discard both the letter and the order (Zosimus, *New History* 4.53). Soon afterwards, Valentinian was discovered dead in his room, a victim more probably of his own hand than of murder (Matthews 1975: 239). Arbogast was nevertheless blamed by Theodosius, and so he sought safety in the nomination of a new emperor for the West, Flavius Eugenius.

A rhetorician and a bureaucrat, his lack of military credentials made him the sort of candidate whom Arbogast could safely dominate (Jones *et al.* 1971: 293). More to the point, although Eugenius himself was a Christian, Arbogast was not. Moreover, Eugenius' Christianity was not heavily borne: he wore a philosopher's beard (Bloch 1963: 199). When attempts to negotiate with Theodosius had broken down, and Eugenius was forced into conflict, the pagan senatorial aristocrats now saw the chance to assert themselves. An alliance was formed with Eugenius (who had little choice, once Theodosius had refused to recognize his claim), who promptly restored funds to the cults – not by state subsidy, but from his own resources (Matthews 1975: 240). Oracles promised the victory of paganism over the upstart Christianity (Chadwick 1984). Nicomachus Flavianus, a pagan luminary who had held high office under Theodosius in happier days, was appointed praetorian prefect; his son became city prefect of Rome. The gods were celebrated in public festivals in the city; temples were rebuilt (Matthews 1970: 478–9); games were celebrated (Matthews 1975: 243f.). Nicomachus Flavianus swept out of Milan and off to war, threatening Ambrose that, upon his return, his basilica would be renovated as a stable (Paulinus, *Life of Ambrose* 31).

When the final confrontation occurred, however, it did not go the way in which Flavianus had boasted. At the Battle of the Frigidus in July 394, Eugenius' army was defeated and Eugenius himself captured and executed. Both Nicomachus Flavianus and Arbogast committed suicide. This victory over Eugenius was also a victory over the pagan senatorial establishment. Although more forgiveness than savagery followed Theodosius' victory, they now knew that they existed at his mercy. The alliance with Eugenius had proven a costly folly, but, given Theodosius' attitude to paganism, they had little choice if they wished to retain their integrity.

CONCLUSION

The Battle of the Frigidus does not mark the final victory of Christianity over paganism. In 408, when the troops of Alaric were besieging Rome, the traditional cults were briefly restored (Zosimus, *New History* 5.41). Pagans continued to worship, quietly and clandestinely. Pagan intellectuals, like Zosimus, continued to mourn the victory of Christianity in their work. But it was a victory which could not be reversed. It is not merely that Constantine had so deeply ingrained Christianity

that it could not be removed. He had not. Julian might well have reversed the process, had he lived longer and pursued a wiser policy.

Rather, Constantine accelerated a process which was occurring under the surface of the Roman world of elites. Language and lifeways were slowly metamorphosing into the form which Christian culture took. By the time Theodosius came to mandate Christianity as the religion of the empire, such a pronouncement can hardly have been either a surprise or a challenge to most people. Those who clung to their ancestral beliefs did so tenaciously, but all the more so in defiance of the inexorable tide of Christianity. It may not have been the Christianity of the Apostles, but it was the Roman Christianity which brought forth Christendom and many of the historical dynamics of the European Middle Ages.³

NOTES

- 1 The standard ancient account, accepted at face value by many scholars (e.g. Frend 1984: 493; Macmullen 1984: 92f.) is that of Epiphanius (*Panarion* 68.1–3). The present writer has preferred the analysis offered by Williams on the basis of the text of the letters of the four Egyptian bishops and Peter himself (*Codex Veronensis* LX, translated in Stevenson 1987: 275–8).
- 2 Originally considered to be a document of the late fourth century, and therefore an accurate depiction of the circle of Symmachus, it is now recognized as a composition of the mid-fifth century (Cameron 1966).
- 3 I would like to take this opportunity to thank my wife Catherine for her constant support, made at no time more manifest than during the composition of this chapter.

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PART III

COMMUNITY FORMATION
AND MAINTENANCE



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MISSION AND EXPANSION



Thomas M. Finn

SOME PRELIMINARIES

Of all the religious groups in the Graeco-Roman world, why did an obscure group of Palestinian Jews spread to become the established religion of the Roman empire in less than four centuries?

A ready answer is the conversion of the emperor Constantine (306–37), coupled with his ‘edict of Milan’ (313) which legalized and subsequently privileged Christianity. To be sure, without Constantine the Christian story would be very different. Yet even before Constantine, Christianity had already arrived as a force to be reckoned with. The puzzle that plagues students of antiquity is how and why?

For ancient and medieval Christians, the only important piece was the miracle of divine dispensation; yet early this century students of the ancient world have turned up a number of other important pieces. They range from early Christianity’s ability to adapt to its surroundings (Harnack: 1908: II, 464), to Christianity as the road to revitalizing an unravelling Graeco-Roman urban social world (Stark 1996). Although pieces abound, a vital piece has largely been taken for granted – conversion. But first, a sketch of the results of conversion.

EARLY CHRISTIAN SPREAD

The numbers

A thumbnail sketch of early Christian expansion might well start with numbers. The earliest source, the Acts of the Apostles, tracks the growth of Christianity from 120 converts gathered in Jerusalem just after Jesus’ death (Acts 1:15) to many thousands (Acts 21:20) by the 60s of our era. Assuming a total population of 60 million in the Roman empire, a recent attempt to track Christian numerical growth suggests the profile shown in Table 11.1 (Stark 1996: 7):¹

The figures in Table 11.1 assume a growth rate of 40 per cent per decade until 350, after which the percentage (though not the numbers) declines. Although the figures correlate well with the few facts that ancient literature and archaeological

Table 11.1 Early Christian expansion: numerical growth

Year	Number of Christians	Percentage of population
40	1,000	0.0017
50	1,400	0.0023
100	7,530	0.0126
150	40,496	0.07
200	217,795	0.36
250	1,171,356	1.9
300	6,299,832	10.5
350	33,882,008	56.6

remains have turned up, they are projections based on what is known about the empire's cities. None the less, they are a framework within which to view the growth of Christianity. Yet empire-wide figures are only initially helpful, because early Christian literature, archaeology, and contemporary social analysis confirm the fact that Christianity was an urban phenomenon. Consider two cities and two different periods.

First the Christians in Rome. Of the 22 Mediterranean cities that numbered 40,000 people or more, Rome was the largest, having a population of about 650,000 at the end of the first century. At the 0.0216 per cent cited in Table 11.1, there were a few less than 1,400 Christians in the city at the end of the first century, whereas in the year 250, when Rome's population was some 700,000, there were about 14,000 (possibly as many as 20,000: Grant 1977: 7). The numbers tally with literary evidence cited by Eusebius that the Roman church had about 155 in ministerial positions (presbyters, deacons, subdeacons, lectors, exorcists and the like) and supported some 1,500 'widows with those in straightened [sic] circumstances' (Oulton-Lawlor 1973: 114-15; Eusebius, *HE* 6.43.3).

Yet population growth was not uniform. In the small (no more than 15,000) Palestinian city of Gaza at the end of the fourth century, for instance, there were 280 Christians, augmented by 163 converts, including men, women, boys, and girls (Grant 1977: 9-11; MacMullen 1984: 86-9). If the above profile were applied uniformly, one would expect 8,000 Gazan Christians, yet they numbered only 443, or 3 per cent. The size of a city and its location were important variables, which cautions one about the application of projections. There were other variables as well, often ominous: persecution, plagues and epidemics, famine, warfare, abortion and birth control, and a 25-year life expectancy – in short, the fragility of ancient life. Clearly, some of the ominous variables were at work both favouring and restricting the growth of Christianity.

The geography

By the end of the first century the records show churches in 42 cities of the empire (Van der Meer and Mohrmann 1958: 2-14).² Although the majority were in the

Roman provinces that constitute modern Turkey, communities of Christians ranged from Rome in the Latin West to Edessa in the Syrian East, and from Philippi in Macedonia to Cyrene in Libya. By the end of the third century Britain had at least five churches; Spain, close to sixty; France and Germany, nearly one hundred; Roman North Africa, over a hundred; not to mention the extensive growth of churches in Italy, and Egypt, and the remarkable expansion in Roman Turkey, which remained the most populous area of the early Christian world. They were almost all urban and so strongly entrenched that the emperor Diocletian (284–305) could look out on a Christian cathedral from his palace in Nicomedia (western Turkey) – he ordered it razed in 303.

Although there were rural Christians, information about them is slender at best. The life of one celebrated Christian missionary, however, sheds some light on the matter: Gregory the Wonder-Worker (210–60). Born into a prominent family in Pontus, a backwater province bordering on the Black Sea, where great estates (like his family's) surrounded small towns and villages, Gregory went to Beirut (Lebanon) to study law and then to Caesarea in Palestine to study with the great Alexandrian Christian teacher, Origen (190–254). In the course of his five years in Caesarea, Gregory became a Christian. He returned to Pontus (about 240) to become the province's missionary bishop. We learn from his fourth-century biographer that when Gregory returned to Pontus there were only 17 Christians, and when he died, there were only 17 pagans. None the less, it was not until the Constantinian settlement that Christianity became a fairly widespread town, village, and countryside phenomenon. Only then, for instance, does the term 'pagan' (*paganus*/country-dweller) become an adjective, usually pejorative, for the non-Jewish and non-Christian religions of the empire.

Regrettably, the historical sources confine their attention primarily to the Graeco-Roman world. Christians, however, went east early. By the end of the second century they were well established in Persia (modern Iraq and Iran), centred themselves in two important Eastern cities, Nisibis (Syria) and Edessa (Turkey), and spoke and wrote Syriac, an Eastern dialect of the Aramaic spoken by Jesus. In the fourth and fifth centuries, Syriac Christianity flourished, producing a number of important figures and works. And if the *Acts of Judas Thomas* (Schneemelcher 1965: 426–531), which describe the conversion of the royal household in the early third century, can be credited Syriac Christianity had penetrated all the way to what is now the modern Indian province of Kerala.

Christians did not just move east; they also moved across the northern borders of the empire – the Danube and the Rhine rivers – and not altogether voluntarily; often they were captives. From about 190 CE, as we will see, the empire slid gradually into helplessness and anarchy. Among the causes (and effects) was the incursion of the Germanic tribes into the shores of the Black Sea, the Balkans, and Greece. Indeed, in 251 the Goths defeated emperor Decius and his army at Beroea in Greece, killing the emperor and his son. Among prisoners of war, the Goths took Christians, who brought their religion with them; a later example, though, Ulphilas (Wulfila, 311–82), embodies this kind of encounter between Christianity and the barbarians. Born to a Christian family in Cappadocia (central Turkey), he was carried off with his family and raised among the Goths. Eventually he became a bishop

(341), settled down in Moesia (Yugoslavia) and, in spite of every kind of hardship, converted many Goths to (Arian) Christianity with ever-increasing success. One key to his success was the fact that he translated the Bible into Gothic (up to that time not a written language).

While the Goths were crossing the Danube river, Franks and Alamanni crossed the Rhine and broke into Gaul, some of them penetrating as far as Spain. In both countries a long-established Gallic and Iberian Christianity met them. Martin of Tours (316–97) embodies the effort to Christianize the barbarians in western Europe during this period (Brown 1996: 102–11). Born to pagan parents in Swabia (Hungary), as an 18-year-old he became a convert, soldier, and adventurer. Eventually he became a monk, founding in 360 (with Hilary of Poitiers) the first known monastery north of the Alps (Ligugé). Because of his reputation as a holy man and healer, he was elected bishop of Tours in 372. For the next 25 years he promoted Christianity and monasticism, giving himself wholeheartedly to evangelizing the rural (and pagan) population of Gaul (France).

Social status

Growth was not just in numbers nor was spread only geographic; Christians advanced socially. Bruce Malina's essay in this volume (Chapter 15) contains a careful consideration of their social status. Some stood fairly high on the social scale, some low (Hopkins 1998: 207–13). We know the names of about one thousand Christians of the first and second centuries and often their social standing, education, legal status, language, and ethnic and religious origin. Luke, to whom the Third Gospel and Acts are attributed, was a physician (Col. 4:14); Onesimus was a fugitive slave (Philem. 16); Cornelius was a legionary line officer (centurion) of the Italian Cohort (Acts 10:1); Clement of Rome (c. 96), a freedman member of the imperial civil service; Justin Martyr (100–65), a philosopher; Vibia Perpetua (d. 203), the daughter of a provincial Roman patrician from Carthage, and her fellow martyr, Felicity, a slave; Phoebe, a deacon from Corinth's Aegean seaport (Rom. 16:1); and Chloe, a householder from Corinth (1 Cor. 1:10).

Although Paul says about his Corinthian Christians 'not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth' (1 Cor. 1:26), and the well-informed pagan critic, Celsus (late second century), claimed that Christians converted only women, children, slaves, and fools (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.55 [Chadwick 1965: 165]; Hoffmann 1987: 72–3), the evidence from the first three centuries suggests otherwise. Granted that the majority were low on the social ladder, the list of names just cited indicates that converts to Christianity came from several strata. Further, to be able to write (a fact to which early Christian literature attests with vigour) meant that a number of Christians were in the top 2 per cent of Roman society (Hopkins 1998: 210). Finally, to be low did not mean that one had to stay low. One could move up; the trick was to acquire the valued criteria of birth, legal standing, wealth, learnt skills, ability, achievement, and style of life (Hopkins 1961: 239–48). In fact, upward mobility was widespread.

The primary avenues were careers in the Roman legions, education, and imperial

civil service (Finn 1982: 31–7). When Augustus (reigned 27 BCE–14 CE) established the empire, for instance, he set up an effective public administration. His creation, the ‘Imperial Household’ (*familia Caesaris*), depended on cadres of lesser officials, whom he drew from his slaves and freedmen, trained and seasoned slave-born professionals – he could count on them because they were his men. Of the training schools, the most famous of the schools was in Rome itself, close to the imperial palace. A graduate could expect to enter the emperor’s service at about twenty, accept a variety of administrative appointments, and expect to be manumitted at about age thirty, and, after that, to receive senior appointments. Such an administrator would retire solid in comfort and status.

Many slaves, Christians among them, travelled this route. Perhaps, more important, their offspring were freeborn with citizenship, permitting them to travel further and faster than their forebears on the avenue of upward mobility. Studies of status change in the empire indicate that it generally took three generations to effect substantial change. An example of Christian mobility is Clement, reputed to be third bishop of Rome (88–97) and the author of a letter called *First Clement* (c. 96) addressed to, and at points chiding and correcting, the church at Corinth. Already in the 50s of our era Paul mentioned that there were Christ-followers in civil service (Phil. 4:22). Clement was just such a one. He appears to have been assigned to the administrative department at Rome which might now be called the foreign office or state department. He would have been able to write good Greek, handle complex calculations, and exercise authority through correspondence with outside agencies, especially the provinces. As it turns out, Clement also owned a house in the city near the Forum, the centre of Roman public life, which was a sign of considerable standing and substance. Not surprisingly, Clement was prominent in the Roman church. Not only did he handle the foreign affairs of the community (he had no hesitation in interfering in the affairs of the church at Corinth), his home may have been among the earliest of the house-churches there.

Although space does not permit exploring the other avenues of upward mobility, suffice it to say that many Christians could be found in education and the military, not to mention trade and commerce. By the middle of the next century (250–60), when emperors Decius and Valerian initiated the first empire-wide attempt to root Christianity out, Christians at the top of the social pyramid – namely, senators and equestrians – were deprived of their rank, lost their property, and, if obdurate, were executed. Similarly, their counterparts, Christian wives (*matronae*) lost their property and were banished. As for those in imperial service, they were also subject to confiscation and returned to slavery.

CONVERSION

Christians had come a long way between 50 and 250. But how had they managed it? An answer requires a consideration of the how’s and why’s – namely, conversion.

The lineage of a word

In the English-speaking world the prevailing image of conversion is contained in a celebrated seventeenth-century hymn, 'Amazing Grace', which limns conversion as a sudden and humanly inexplicable inner transformation. This century, psychologists tended to reinforce this hymnic view. According to Harvard psychologist, William James (1902), it was a process by which the self, divided, guilt-ridden, and unhappy becomes unified free of guilt, and happy because of religion.³ Paul on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:1–9) and Augustine in the garden at Milan (*Confessions* 8.29 [O'Donnell 1992: 101–2]) rapidly became the models, underscoring conversion as the result of amazing grace.

With the arrival of new Eastern religions on American shores in the 1950s, however, the image changed. Social scientists took an interest in these new religions and conversion, establishing a broader model that delineates conversion as a gradual process, involving (1) the total life-setting of the potential convert; (2) an identity crisis; (3) an active search for a new identity, meaning, and purpose in life; (4) encounter with a new religious reality that engages a wide range of social and psychic needs; (5) continual and mutual interaction with the community that embodies the new religious reality; (6) a clear-cut choice between one's previous way of living and a new way that yields commitment; and (7) gradual transformation of attitudes and values mirrored in conduct (Rambo 1993: 16–18). In short, conversion is an extended and many-layered process, nor does it necessarily entail crossing boundaries from one religion to another. The author of 'Amazing Grace', John Newton, for instance, was a Christian who turned to a more intense and, as he thought, more authentic Christianity.

Conversion in antiquity exhibited these characteristics, including conversion to Christianity which blended two ancient traditions (Aubin 1962). The first was Greek and Roman, and emphasized 'turning' (from and to). For Plato and his many followers conversion was a personal process of turning away from an old way of seeing and existing to a new way, one that put one in touch with reality itself. The second was biblical, emphasizing the personal. Conversion was a return to the one God, a turning which involved repentance, reconciliation with God, and rededication to his service.

Records of conversions

For the ancient pagans, Jews, and Christians, conversion was a gradual process interlaced with ritual. To be sure, there was a decisive moment on which everything turned as if on an axis, but, as the ancients saw it, every conversion had a history. Although the process can be amply documented for pagans and Jews as well as Christians (Finn 1997: 67–136), our immediate concern is with the latter. The documents which follow are snapshots of the process, which, of course, differed, though not significantly in structure or function, at different places and times during the years 150 to 450 of our era.

The first document is the diary account of the arrest and execution of a young Roman woman convert in North Africa in 202/3, *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*,

two women who are profiled in Chapter 41 of this volume; similarly the second, a document from third-century Rome, the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus (Cumming 1976: 8–31); and the third, a fourth-century set of instructions or homilies on baptism and the Eucharist from Jerusalem and its bishop, Cyril, *The Mystagogical Catecheses* (Yarnold 1994: 67–97), coupled with an eye-witness account, *The Diary of Egeria*, a western pilgrim in the city about 380 (Gingras 1970: 49–128).

Perpetua's diary

Among the ominous variables that deeply affected Christian mission and expansion for 300 years was persecution. The very possibility darkened many a door, reinforcing the tendency of Christian communities to keep very much to themselves and draw clear and well-protected boundaries between themselves and their world. Such is the data from the most influential account of martyrdom in antiquity (Salisbury 1977: 1–20). The heart of the work (chs 3:1–10:15) is a diary by Perpetua, an educated, well brought up, and pious young Roman woman (aged 22) from high society in Carthage (the family name was Vibius), a city of some 400,000, which in the West was second in distinction only to Rome. She was married and the mother of a 2-year old son (a *matrona*).

At some point, perhaps about the time she married, Perpetua and her brother (because he is unnamed, his surname, Vibius, is used hereafter) encountered Christianity in Carthage. Attracted, they became 'catechumens', the technical name for committed inquirers. Rooted in the Greek word that gives us the English word 'echo', it denotes one who hears oral instruction so attentively that it resounds in one's conduct.

What was the attraction for Perpetua and Vibius? Although she does not say, it doubtless had much to do with turmoil in the empire (Geffcken 1978: 1–113). From the years 96 to 180 there had been only five emperors; in the next 103 there were 29, almost all of whom would live and die violently. The army, which had been under civilian control, was now in control of civilian life. Even the civil service had become the preserve of the military, making it a heavy-handed and extortionist bureaucracy. The economy, the source of provincial prosperity, was racked with runaway inflation and escalating taxes. In short, the disintegration of an ancient civilization and the making of a new one seemed at hand (Brown 1978: 1–80).

Many in the empire of Perpetua's day, even those insulated from the disorder around them, sensed an inner disorder. They had grown up expecting easy access to their deities, to see and talk with them regularly and to experience their protection. As the astronomer, Ptolemy, in the middle of the second century, put it:

Mortal though I be, yea ephemeral, if but a moment I gaze up to the night's starry domain of heaven. Then no longer on earth I stand; I touch the Creator. And my lively spirit drinks immortality.

(Ingham and Bowra 1938: 643, n. 621)

Even for the pious of the empire like the Vibius family, the divine world seemed to have spun away from the human, leaving a yawning gap. Moreover, the traditional rituals, the purpose of which was to keep the two worlds united, had lost

their grip. The result was a moral, intellectual, and spiritual ferment evident from many inscriptions characterized by a longing for the divine. Some people coped with the longing by intensifying dedication to their ancient religious traditions, others embraced mysticism, magic, divination, oracles, or philosophy – or all five. Still others joined the rush hour of the gods from the East. Converts to these ‘new religions’ – and there were many – sought that lost intimacy with the divine by mounting quests for a new intimacy, accessibility, and assured protection. Robert Turcan’s comment about the inhabitants of Rome is applicable across the ancient board, and surely to Carthaginians:

Where the individual no longer plays an active, direct, and personal part in the running of (Rome), he inevitably loses interest and seeks responsibilities elsewhere, in other sodalities, other ‘fraternities’. Religious micro-societies and ‘mystery’ sects assure him of a kind of reintegration and existence, when traditional frameworks and institutional authorities are in decline, failing in their mission.

(Turcan 1997: 17)

In short, the individual seeks to build a world-view or sacred world; that is, a new world of order, meaning and purpose (Doran 1996: 1–7). As the conversion-criteria above suggest, the life-setting of many in the empire, including Perpetua and Vibius, occasioned a crisis of religious identity that prompted a search for a new way of ordering their sacred world. But how did they find it? Again, she does not say, but clues abound in their religious world. From the beginning, Christianity spread rapidly among largely ordinary people, who were responsive to demonstrations of power. The ancient world equated divinity and power; power was the essence of divinity for Jews and gentiles, high and low, alike; and works of power authenticated the presence of divinity (MacMullen 1984: 10–42). Oracles, dreams, exorcisms, healings, to name a few, bore the stamp of true divinity, giving assurance of the presence and beneficence of the divine, an assurance essential in one’s sacred world.

It is no surprise, then, that such events are highlighted in the New Testament and early Christian literature. The story-line in Luke and Acts is that God’s Spirit empowers Jesus, the apostles, and early disciples, and miraculously accomplishes the rapid spread of Christianity in spite of every obstacle. The stimulus for this story-line was almost certainly the reality of charismatic phenomena experienced in the communities of Christ-followers from Pentecost onwards, for which 1 Corinthians 12–14 is our best evidence. In emphasizing especially oracles, dreams, visions, and miraculous constancy, Perpetua’s diary simply continues Luke’s story-line. As for Carthaginian Christianity, the data from the first half of the third century indicate that the church there was ‘Spirit-filled’ (Robeck 1992: 1–8), much as was the church at Corinth which Paul depicts in his correspondence with Corinth. For Perpetua, Vibius, and the other catechumens, God was not only near but in the Carthaginian church, a community knit by close personal bonds and attachments – Turcan’s true ‘sodality’.

Arrested with Perpetua were Felicity and Revocatus, slaves in the Vibius household. Perhaps they were the first members of the household to encounter the church, where they would have found a much gentler world of power than domestic slaves

were accustomed to. If so they may have been Perpetua's and Vibius' contacts, since the message generally went from bottom to top, and face-to-face encounters were close to the only kind of positive meeting points between pagan and Christian (MacMullen 1984: 21). All four clearly found bonds and attachments which made possible that experience of the divine presence for which they longed. From the beginning of Christianity, extended networks of personal relationships and attachments were the primary means of the movement's spread, and the household was their embodiment.

But chance encounters with this new and different sacred world would not have secured understanding and commitment. Continual interaction was required, for which the training of catechumens (called 'catechumenate') was designed, as we will shortly see. For Perpetua and the two slaves, hardly had their training begun when it took a sharp turn in an unanticipated direction. The emperor, himself an African (Septimius Severus), promulgated an edict (202) that outlawed conversion to both Judaism and Christianity. As converts-in-process they were prime targets.

The edict prompted the arrest of a number of catechumens. From the diary we learn the names of at least six: 'Revocatus and his fellow slave Felicitas, Saturninus and Secundulus, and with them Vibia Perpetua' (*Passiones sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 3 [Musurillo 1972: 3/108]). Vibius, for reasons unknown, was not arrested, but one more Christian was added later, Saturus, a leader in the church, who voluntarily joined the five to shore them up. Hardly had Perpetua been arrested when she was baptized and taken to a holding prison, a foul basement. Two deacons from the community managed to bribe the jailers to give their charges respite. What had tried Perpetua more than anything at first was the fact that her infant son, starved for his mother's milk, was failing. The respite permitted her to nurse him, whom she then gave up to her mother's and brother's care.

Hard days followed. One of the catechumens, Secundulus, died in prison, and Perpetua's health broke. When she recovered, she got permission for her baby to stay with her, which, she says, made her cell a 'palace' (*Passiones sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 3 [Musurillo 1972: 3/110]). Even so, there was her father's almost violent anger at what he regarded as her unreasoning contumacy. Her mother seemed more supportive and her catechumen brother, Vibius, was an ally; unfortunately, we hear nothing about her other brother and her husband. Although Vibius visited her frequently, her conversion seems to have torn the family apart. What dominates the account, however, is the familial interaction between the catechumens and the faithful: continual visits, material support, including the two deacons and the bribe, Saturus' voluntary surrender, and the concern for Felicity, who was eight months pregnant when arrested. She had her baby in prison, a girl, whom one of the women in the church brought up as her own daughter.

When Perpetua's harried father heard that the hearing before the governor was set, he came to persuade his daughter to renounce her new faith and friends. To no avail, for she had made her choice and commitment. The hearing soon followed. Arraigned before the governor and a large crowd, Perpetua's companions admitted their Christianity. 'Then,' we read, 'when it came my turn, my father appeared with my son, dragged me from the step and said: "Have pity on your father's grey head; have pity on your infant son. Offer the sacrifice for the welfare of the emperors"'



Figure 11.1 The colosseum at Thysdrus (modern El Jem, Tunisia), south-east of Carthage.
Photo T. M. Finn.

(*Passiones sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 6 [Musurillo 1972: 6/112–14]). She refused, and affirmed to the governor that she was indeed a Christian. All five were sentenced to violent death in a wild-beast hunt at the amphitheatre, and were returned in chains to prison. The day before the hunt, Perpetua and Saturus had striking visions (for her, one of many), which assured them that they would know victory in the morrow's test. Little remains of the amphitheatre at Carthage, but the ruins of the colosseum at nearby Thysdrus give us some idea of what it must have been like (see Figures 11.1 and 11.2).

An eye-witness, the Christian to whom Perpetua confided her diary, recounts the deaths of the five. Further, it appears that more than one of the spectators, even one of the soldiers (Prudens), who participated in the execution of Saturus, were moved to become converts. Paradoxically, persecution, designed to stamp out Christianity, was an instrument of spread. Tertullian (160–240), Perpetua's contemporary and the most influential Latin thinker and writer before Augustine, wrote to the governor, Scapula, several years (212) after Perpetua's death:

Yet this community will be undying, for be assured that just at the time of its seeming demise it is built up all the stronger. For all who witness the noble patience of its martyrs, are struck with misgivings and inflamed with the desire to examine into the matter in question; and as soon as they come to know the truth, they straightway enroll themselves as its disciples.

(*To Scapula* 5 [Arbesmann 1962: 5/161])



Figure 11.2 Mosaic of a charioteer from the circus at Carthage, from the Bardo Museum in Tunis. Photo: T. M. Finn.

Catechumenate in Carthage

The normal conversion process for Perpetua and her steadfast companions was cut short; thus, the diary does not speak of the catechumenate. But her brother's was not. For a sketch of what it was like, however, we can turn to Tertullian, who published the earliest treatise on baptism about 200 (Tertullian, *De baptismo* 1–20 [Evans 1964: 5–43]), and to an invaluable contemporary document from Rome, called the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus (2–21 [Botte 1963: 1–103; Cumming 1976: 8–31]). Since Roman and North African practice were similar, they permit us to fill in the blanks.

If Felicity and Revocatus had been the initial contacts who interested Perpetua and Vibius in the church, at some point they would have brought them to the church building and the teachers early in the morning before the faithful arrived. They would have been asked a battery of questions about personal status (slave?, free?, married?, etc.), and, for Vibius, also occupational questions to determine whether he was engaged in any forbidden or immoral activities. Were he, he would have either promised to desist or be rejected out of hand. As sponsors, Felicity and Revocatus had to go surety for the truth of their answers.

Clearly Perpetua and Vibius passed muster, successfully completing the rite of enrolment. From that point on they were 'hearers', that is, catechumens under instruction, which appears to have been a blend of biblical reading and commentary, creedal (doctrinal), liturgical, moral instruction, interlaced with rites of worship, especially exorcism. Although belief and its content were vital, reformation of life

was the litmus test conversion and that could be assured only with continual ritual interaction. With the other catechumens, they would have attended frequent, perhaps daily, instruction and prayer early in the morning, with none apart from the faithful. At dismissal, the teacher (perhaps, it was Tertullian himself) placed his hand over them, prayed, and sent them on their way. As hearers, Perpetua and Vibius were subject to frequent exorcism, a powerful and effective event and the sign of their marginal condition of betwixt and between being Christians. They would remain hearers normally for several years, but the time could be shortened if character and conduct showed the evidence of conversion at work. For Perpetua and her companions the evidence was unmistakable. For Vibius and the rest of the catechumens it continued to term.

At the end of their probation and instruction, there was another interrogation. The first, enrolment, began what turned out to be an intense screening, as well as a formative, process. The second, later called 'scrutiny', ended it. This time conduct rather than status was the issue. Had Vibius lived honestly?, honoured widows?, visited the sick and the imprisoned?, done every good work? In short, had his values, way of life, and conduct demonstrably changed? Again, his sponsor – since Perpetua and companions were dead, perhaps the woman who was bringing up Felicity's daughter – would have to go surety for his answers.

Granted that he passed scrutiny, he was now one chosen for baptism and set apart from the other catechumens. Whereas he had been a hearer (*auditor*) now he was a chosen one (*electus*). The curriculum of instruction changed. He could now 'hear the gospel' (Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 20 [Botte 1963: 42; Cumming 1976: 26]), and at the end of instruction he was exorcised. As the day of baptism approached (a Sunday, normally Easter), the bishop performed a solemn exorcism to determine whether he was 'free of every alien spirit' (Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 20 [Botte 1963: 42; Cumming 1976: 26]). Anyone who, in his judgement, had not heard the instructions 'with faith, for it is impossible that the Alien (Satan) should hide himself forever' (Cumming 1976: 26) was set aside. The scrutiny was to determine the extent to which Vibius' spirit had really changed.

After several weeks, on a Thursday (before Easter) Vibius and his fellow *electi* were instructed to bathe, and on Friday and Saturday to fast (presumably from both food and water). On Saturday night they assembled for a final solemn exorcism by the bishop. They then spent the entire night in vigil hearing the scriptures and commentaries (called 'homilies') on the readings.

At cockcrow on Sunday (Easter), solemn baptism began. Vibius formally renounced Satan and all he stood for, and the bishop anointed him with the oil of exorcism. A deacon descended with Vibius into the water as he professed an early version of the Apostles' creed. The deacon then imposed his hand on his head, and asked him three questions: the first about his belief in God the Father, the second about the Son, and the third about the Holy Spirit. To each question Vibius answered, 'I believe'; after each answer he was immersed in the water, then anointed with perfumed oil, the 'oil of thanksgiving.' When he had dried, he put on a white garment, and, when all the newly baptized were assembled, the bishop imposed his hand over them and offered a prayer that spelled out the meaning of baptism:

Lord God, you who have made them worthy to receive remission of sins through the bath of regeneration by the holy Spirit, send into them your grace that they may serve you according to your will; for to you is glory, to the Father and the Son with the holy Spirit, both now and to the ages of ages. Amen.

(Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 21 [Botte 1963: 52; Cumming 1976: 20])

The bishop then imposed his hand on the head of each, pouring oil on their heads, anointing with the sign of the cross on their foreheads, and offering each a kiss of peace and welcome.

But the rite of initiation (as it came to be called) was not over. They processed to the assembly room with a table for their first celebration of the Eucharist, which included bread and three cups: one of water to symbolize the interior cleansing accomplished by baptism, one of milk and honey to symbolize their entry into the Promised Land, and a cup of wine to symbolize the blood of Christ who redeemed them. Finally, they were the cynosure of special celebrations during the week following, which centred around the Eucharist and homilies that underscored the meaning of baptism and their experience of the catechumenate.

In retrospect, Vibius gradually turned from the sacred world of his Roman upbringing (he would bring much of it with him) and was initiated into the new sacred world of Christianity. The heart of the process, the catechumenate, was the long oral course of biblical, creedal, and moral instruction embedded in communal rites of worship, especially prayer and exorcism. Finally he was ritually born into a new family, renouncing an old network of kinship relations and acquiring a new one. His rebirth climaxed three weeks of increasingly complex, dramatic, and demanding rites.

Such was the early Christian catechumenate. The ancients found such 'mysteries' immensely attractive. The data from the mystery religions reveal that such ritual processes excited and aroused the senses of those left cold by the more formalistic worship of the Roman gods. The sound and rhythms, colour and visual contrasts, sanctuaries, gestures, ritual enactments, evocation of death and resurrection, deprivations, and personal attention all conspired to open a new sacred world and give body and soul to deep-buried aspirations.

Vibius and the other *electi*, however, were not only drawn to the Christian mystery, they were refashioned by it. Their interaction with the Carthaginian church had a clear pattern in which instruction and ritual were inextricably bound together. The process was cognitive — a new cultural, social, and religious world was built. At the same time it was performative — the new world was embraced and entered (Turner 1986). Conversion was enacted in a deeply symbolic drama, one that resists reduction to its psychological, social, or religious components. For the ancients, at least, it was a drama in which the divine and human intersected, resulting in transformation.

Why did some choose Christianity, when other Eastern religions beckoned? They do not say, but the question is not beyond answering. Intelligent and articulate Pagans and Christians faced off with each other in the early centuries. Pagans accused Christians of plagiarizing doctrines and rites from them, and Christians,

who considered the Pagan deities demons, replied in kind. The result? An apologetical stand-off.

But the entire encounter between paganism and Christianity was not a stand-off. Paganism was pluralist, disparate, and often plagued with contradictions. During the third century these emigrating religions from the East, or, rather, their deities, individually tended to acquire supremacy. The Egyptian Isis, for instance, gradually came to embody deity itself; she was the 'Queen of Heaven' and the 'Lady of the Waves'. This movement towards one supreme deity among the many, called 'henotheism', was but a symptom of the problem in paganism: the profusion of deities led to confusion in people's minds and insecurity in their hearts. They met the longing for the divine and the demand for supernatural assurance, to be sure, but as one pagan philosopher, Plutarch, put it: 'Their good fame flourished only a short time, and then, convicted of false glory and imposture . . . like smoke arising, they flew off' (Plutarch, *Moralia* 360C [MacMullen 1981: 96]). The record shows that in their search for what they considered 'true divinity', the ancients expected a deity which authenticated itself by 'wide and long-lasting impact' on one's life (Turcan 1997: 333–4). For Vibius, and catechumens generally, the encounter with Christianity effected that deep and long-lasting impact. Martyrdom, like Perpetua's, was the ultimate test of the impact, but there were other tests which arrested the attention of even the most pious Pagans. Galen (d. 200), the court physician and philosopher, observed:

For their contempt for death . . . is patent to us every day, and likewise their restraint in cohabitation . . . and they also number individuals who, in self-discipline and self-control in matters of food and drink, and in their keen pursuit of justice, have attained a pitch not inferior to that of genuine philosophers.

(Galen, *Plato Arabus* 1.99 [Ferguson 1993: 564])⁴

But behind these demonstrable changes stood the conviction expressed in the Christian 'rule of faith' that an almighty God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself, forgiving sins, and offering them risen and eternal life (see 2 Cor. 5:19). The pre-Constantinian catechumenate proved to be a profoundly effective means of conversion and, as such, a principal organ of the mission and expansion of Christianity.

Conversion in Jerusalem

As the population statistics above suggest, the fourth century changed everything. Baptism in blood disappeared and the church moved out of the catacombs into the forum, a move that came from three emperors: Galerius (305–12) and Constantine (285–337), who enacted the edicts of toleration (311 and 313), and Theodosius I (379–96), who established Christianity as the religion of the empire.

Predictably, the move had enormous consequences. From a cult to be shunned, the church became an institution to be embraced. Whereas social and legal jeopardy had forced the church to guard its gates sedulously for 300 years, social and legal toleration threatened to open the gates to a flood of people who, for a hundred different reasons, wanted to enter. The problem was how to keep the floodgates in

place and prevent the flood from washing away the tenacious faith of the early centuries. The solution turned on the catechumenate, which prompts a trip from Carthage to Jerusalem, where the solution first comes to light (Finn 1997: 188–211).

With toleration, Christian eyes and feet turned to the holiest of holy places: Jerusalem. Constantine and his mother, Helena, were among the first pilgrims, she to find there the cross of Christ and he to build two striking basilicas at the sites of Christ's death and resurrection – the Martyrium, to commemorate his death, and the Anastasis, to commemorate his resurrection. In between the two churches he built a garden court, where a cross stood to mark the place of Christ's death. Israel's Holy City, which had become a pagan city 200 years earlier (132 CE), was transformed into the city of the death and resurrection of Jesus. People streamed to Jerusalem precisely to be there where Jesus had lived, taught, died, and risen, and whose power and presence remained. That longing for the divine, coupled with the ancient association of divinity and space, simply intensified with the coming of Constantine.

How many people there were in fourth-century Jerusalem is unknown, but the projections charted at the outset indicate that by mid-century the majority (56 per cent) were Christians. But even if we do not know numbers, we know about the structure of the church in Jerusalem. Chief was the bishop, Cyril (315–87). Gathered around him as his councillors were the presbyters. They preached and taught, read the scriptures, led much of the worship, registered catechumens, exorcised, and ministered in the surrounding villages. In addition, there were exorcists and deacons. And among the faithful, three ranks existed: numerous ascetics (monks and nuns), the baptized, and the catechumens. It was a Greek-speaking community, though Palestinian Aramaic and some Latin could be heard on the streets and in church. Catechumens were numerous and of two kinds: those who had been enrolled and those who had been accepted for baptism (the *auditors* and the *electi*, respectively, in Carthage). Given the favoured position of the church, it was an obvious advantage to be a catechumen. As in Carthage, catechumens were considered Christians by aspiration and anticipation, if not by initiation. Almost all were gentiles and pagans (for over two hundred years Jews had been forbidden entry into the city under pain of death). Some were simply curious hearers; some were courting a potential Christian spouse; some were trying to please someone or win favour; some were Christian children and young adults; some sought social advantage and economic gain; some simply wanted to belong somewhere; but all had personal contact with Christians.

Whatever reason brought them to enrolment, the work of the catechumenate was to change the faithless into the faithful, however long that might take. The advantage of having this first class of catechumens, the hearers, was that it gave people a threshold status in the church without opening the floodgates. They would be hearers until they were ready for baptism. In fact, many delayed for years. Most of those raised in Christian households as catechumens, for instance, were baptized as adults. Even pagans like Constantine (who considered himself the 'bishop of those outside') was baptized practically on his deathbed, and Augustine of Hippo was a catechumen for 33 years (354–87).

Some catechumens, however, actively sought baptism. For those, the Jerusalem church adapted an institution already in place by the year 330: the 40-day fast in

preparation for Easter. The 'forty days' quickly became the technical term for the pre-Easter season ('Lent' in English). Cyril seems to have been the one who united the preparation of catechumens chosen for baptism and the '40-days' of ascetic preparation for Easter. They coincided admirably, because the function of both was to renew the community; ascetic preparation, to replenish the community's fervour, and baptismal preparation, to replenish its numbers and vigour. Social scientists have long realized that rituals, especially rites of initiation, are remarkably effective in replenishing the bonds that knit a community together (Turner 1969: 94-130). The kind of devout and closely knit community that attracted and nourished Perpetua, Vibius, and companions continued its sway in fourth-century Jerusalem and elsewhere.

Those who had made the decision for baptism assembled in the Martyrium at the beginning of Lent. Enrolment was like the rite in Carthage, save that Bishop Cyril did the interrogating. If nothing turned up, the candidate was accepted; if the result were otherwise, he or she was rejected, with the demand for amendment of life.

The 'chosen' were now embarked on an eight-week odyssey. Fasting was enjoined (a bland meal of gruel and water once a day was customary) and bathing was out. Prayer and instruction coupled with exorcism was the daily fare for the first seven weeks; the daily rite lasted from 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. Exorcism, which came towards the end of the service, was intense and designed to shatter the ill-disposed: the chosen lay prone with faces veiled, while the exorcists (each of the chosen had one) harassed them to force the evil spirit in the subject to give way to the Holy Spirit. The intent was therapeutic: gradual withdrawal from the power of one's religious culture and past life and habits.

Once exorcised, the chosen, both men and women, sat in a circle around Cyril, surrounded by their sponsors and the faithful. He devoted the first four weeks to biblical reading and commentary (an eyewitness calls the commentary 'catechesis'), and in his commentary he emphasized the applicability of the Bible to his hearers' moral lives.

On Monday of the fifth week, Cyril changed the curriculum to the creed, and for the next three weeks explained each of the articles of the Jerusalem creed (the creed of Nicaea). Coached by sponsors, family, and friends, the chosen sought to understand the creed better and commit it to memory.

On Sunday of the eighth week (called 'Great Week' then, and now, 'Holy Week'), the last stage of the odyssey began. Monday through Wednesday were crammed with dramatic liturgy generally at the appropriate biblical site. Excitement intensified with the approach of Thursday evening. The chosen broke their fast at a meal in honour of the Last Supper, and bathed to commemorate Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet.

The crucifixion was the focus on Friday. The rites consisted of the veneration of the cross (Helena's find?), which lay on the altar of the Martyrium, and at three in the afternoon, faithful and candidates assembled before the Constantinian cross in the garden court. Cyril sat before the monument, and the gospel account of Christ's passion was read, followed by other New Testament readings interspersed with appropriate psalms.

The moment for which the candidates had long and rigorously prepared began Saturday evening; the vigil for Easter had arrived. Faithful, godparents, friends, family, and candidates assembled in the Martyrium. The vigil consisted of 12 readings from the Bible on carefully chosen themes to illuminate the meaning of baptism; psalms and meditations were interspersed.

With the last psalm, the candidates were led out of the Martyrium, across the garden court, to the baptistery. As in Carthage, the candidates were ritually stripped and anointed. Then, one by one, they faced west, stretched out a hand, and in words of renunciation, broke their ancient pact with Satan. They then faced east, where the baptismal font stood and paradise was believed to lie. A new pact was made, the terms of which were a simplified form of the creed Cyril had taught them. They were then anointed.

Newly anointed and naked, they processed to the baptismal font. Each candidate entered the pool and, as at Carthage, was immersed three times in the font. Cyril made dramatically clear the significance of the immersion:

What a strange and astonishing situation! We did not really die, we were not really buried, we did not really hang from the cross and rise again. All this he did gratuitously for us [on this very site], so that we might share his sufferings by imitating them, and gain salvation in actuality.

(Cyril, *Catecheses Mystagogicae* 2.5 [Yarnold 1994: 76–7])

After they came up from the font, the newly baptized were anointed with aromatic oil on the forehead, ears, nostrils, and, finally, on the chest. The imposition of hands immediately followed, signifying the descent of the Holy Spirit.

Baptismal candidates no longer, the newly baptized now could affirm, 'I am a Christian.' Each one put on a white garment, received a candle to signify enlightenment, and processed to the church of the Resurrection to symbolize their own resurrection. After that, at the Martyrium they were welcomed into their new family and celebrated their first Eucharistic meal. The week following – Easter Week – was marked with special celebrations of their new birth.

CONCLUSION

Christianity continued to spread from generation to generation and place to place in Late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Its mission remained consistent: to initiate people, Christians and non-Christians alike, into a sacred world centred, as one of the earliest missionaries put it, on 'God in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us' (2 Cor. 5:19).

Our primary concern, however, has been with the spread of that early Christian sacred world within the world of Greece and Rome and beyond. From 120 Palestinian Jews in the year 30 CE, Christians grew to number over thirty million in 350. Located largely in cities from Britain to India and the Balkans to the Sahara, they came to be the established majority. Conversion was the key. Conversions in antiquity – Christian, Jewish, and pagan – involved an extended process, comprising cognitive

and performative elements inextricably bound together, instruction and ritual. The goal was transformation.

A profound change in the sacred world of Graeco-Roman paganism in the first three centuries of our era occasioned numerous conversions to both Judaism and the new religions from the East, including Christianity. The close bonds between the human and divine worlds of the traditional religions had begun to unravel, leaving many with a longing for a secure and lasting intimacy with the divine. The spinning away of the human and divine worlds provoked an identity crisis for many, which, in turn, provoked a quest for a new and more secure sacred world. Above all, the religions that attracted the searchers offered what was missing, or at least diminished, in their old way of piety: a redolent sense of divine accessibility and intimacy. Even more important, the searcher perceived that the religion embodied the divine in a community where a wide range of reassuring bonds and personal networks linked them to the divine.

The question for both searcher and community was how to accomplish initiation into the new religion. The answer of the early church was the catechumenate, which involved the three stages we have considered in Carthage and Jerusalem: (1) rites of separation from the old way of life and piety (enrolment); (2) an in-between stage where one is neither of the old nor of the new way (the long period of instruction); and (3) incorporation into the new (election and baptism in Carthage and Lent and baptism in Jerusalem). The second stage was critical in the spread of early Christianity. Anthropologist Victor Turner calls it the 'liminal' stage, about which he says:

The attributes of liminality or liminal personae ('threshold people') are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classification that normally locates states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, convention and ceremonial. (Turner 1969: 85)

The catechumens were just such 'threshold people'. Precisely as 'liminals' they were gradually refashioned for their baptismal transformation. What is remarkable about this liminal stage is that liminality is a fertile source of rituals and symbols, not to mention myths, philosophical systems, and works of art. The abundance of rituals in the catechumenate enabled the catechumens to enact their conversion; it was a process of becoming, the ancient image for which was death and rebirth. In addition, as Turner notes, the rites of the liminal stage refashion the community, burning away the failings of lax devotion and life and revitalizing the members' own conversions.

We have considered the Carthaginian church as a case study of conversions to Christianity before Constantine. The initial encounter was the result of personal contact and example, as in the case of the Vibius household. Thereafter, as the catechumenate demonstrates (Judaism and the mysteries had counterparts), the encounter was continual and mutual, extending over several years before conversion was established and full membership given. In the process, the catechumen was prepared for and faced a clear-cut choice between an old way and a new one that

demanding commitment, even if (as Perpetua and companions reminded Carthaginian Christians) it cost one's life. The litmus test was the transformation of attitudes and values mirrored in conduct.

Because of the Constantinian settlement, the social world of the fourth century changed remarkably. Although longing for the divine remained, motives that prompted the quest differed widely. The Jerusalem church provides a window on fourth-century conversion. Children raised in Christian households were customarily enrolled as catechumens in infancy; opportunism prompted some adults to seek catechumen status; for others marriage was the motive; and for still others, it was simply expected in a predominantly Christian society. Lest the flood of potential converts wash away the faith and piety of the first three centuries, the Jerusalem church, while retaining aspects of the hearer-stage of the catechumenate, developed the Lenten catechumenate for those chosen for baptism. Centred around the biblical sites of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, the catechumenate in Jerusalem sought to attract and initiate candidates into the Christian sacred world by identifying them with the life, death, and resurrection of Christ through an extended symbolic drama. The effect of that drama on the entire population was palpable. Egeria, who witnessed the drama in about 380, comments in her diary about the people's response. On (Holy) Thursday night, for instance, when the account of Jesus' arrest was read in Gethsemani just outside the east wall of the city, the ululations of the people could be heard through out the city, and at the centre of the city 'all without exception were ready at hand, the old, the young, the rich, the poor, everyone' (Egeria, *Itinerarium Aetherae* 36.5 [Pétre 1948: 232; Gingras 1970: 109]). Egeria leaves one with the impression that all of Jerusalem participated in a week-long symbolic Passion Play.

Although there is little question about the overall effectiveness of the catechumenate in the mission and spread of Christianity during the first four centuries, the differences in the Christian situation in the Constantinian and pre-Constantinian worlds are sufficiently striking to make any detailed comparative assessment hazardous. Eventually, the catechumenate would recede, largely in the face of infant baptism, the massive barbarian conversions in the early Middle Ages, and a sacred and social world strikingly different from that of the Graeco-Roman world.

NOTES

- 1 The earliest serious attempt is that of Harnack 1908: II, 1–32, but see also Grant 1977: 1–12 and MacMullen (1984: 102–19), who thinks that there were about five million at 300. At the time of writing, the most recent attempt is Hopkins (1998: 192–6), in which his scale, though positing a growth rate of 3.5 per cent compounded per year, is similar.
- 2 But see Hopkins (1998: 198–207).
- 3 The Jamesian view (James 1908: 189) prevailed for decades, influencing the scholar who wrote the earliest seminal study on conversion in antiquity, Arthur Darby Nock (Nock 1933: 1–16). Nock distinguished between 'adhesion' and 'conversion'. By the former he meant participation in one's traditional religion; by the latter, a deliberate turning from indifference or an earlier form of piety to another – crossing from former religious

boundaries to new ones (Nock 1933: 7). He concluded that only prophetic religions (Judaism and Christianity) required conversion, while the other Graeco-Roman religions required only adhesion.

- 4 The passage is preserved only in Arabic, which Waltzer sets out (1979: 15) and discusses (1979: 89ff.)

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF OFFICE IN THE EARLY CHURCH



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If we follow Weber (1927) in his division of authority into three types – charismatic, rational or legal and traditional – the third has little relevance to ecclesiastical ministry in the early Christian era. Priesthoods were not inherited, and though property was, we can only guess at the influence that was exercised over primitive congregations by the owners of the houses in which they gathered. For Weber the mark of Catholic Christianity is a bureaucratic priesthood whose authority is of the rational or legal type, and he follows Rudolf Sohm in the belief that this had quickly supervened on an earlier phase in which the leaders of the new movement had no legal or traditional credentials, and therefore owed their following entirely to their own gifts. On this account (for Sohm if not for Weber), the first two centuries are an age of purity, while the era of the church Fathers is the beginning of ecclesiastical decadence. In response historians of all denominations have denied that the evidence lends itself to such a clear antithesis. The truth appears to be that the restraint of charismatic gifts began with the Apostles, that the exercise of them never implied a negation of authority, and that some at least were indulged, or even encouraged, by the emerging magisterium. The most judicious narrative will be one that, in the words of Edouard Schweizer (1961: 230) finds a way ‘between Rome and Sohm’.

The issue is too often addressed without noting that there are distinct phenomena which might all be termed charismatic on Weber’s principles, but which need not co-exist in the same religious personality. The most evident sign of holiness is the possession of supernatural abilities, which in the early church included prophecy, *glossolalia* and the power of healing. It was often the erudite laity, not the clerics, who denied these; Augustine, for example, saw contemporary miracles only when he became a bishop (*City of God* 18). A second grace conferred by merit rather than position is a virtuous life, especially one enhanced by willing abstinence from food, sleep, sexual intercourse or lucrative employment. Such austerities, often characteristic of the clergy, are also observed by laymen in communities where a rigorous demarcation of the offices is maintained. Charismatic status can be obtained in a third, more questionable manner by conspicuous tribulation, and above all by imprisonment or martyrdom in a time of persecution. The Christian hierarchy was at pains to show that such events might give a man the status of a confessor, but

would not suffice to invest him with the prerogatives conferred by ordination. Nevertheless, we shall see that it was only in the fourth century – and then in opposition to schismatics, not confessors – that the episcopate could hope to disarm its rivals with the ‘institutional’ argument that sanctity resided in the office, not the man.

THE CHARISMATA AND THE THREEFOLD MINISTRY

It is well known that the letters which are most securely attributed to Paul have nothing to say about the functions of ecclesiastical ministers. We do not know if there was an appointed celebrant for the Eucharist in Corinth; we do not know who was charged with reading out the apostle’s letters in the churches of Thessalonika, Corinth, Galatia or Rome. The Epistle to the Philippians (1:1) addresses their *episkopoi* or overseers and *diakonoi* or servitors, and the latter term is also applied to Phoebe in the greetings attached to Romans (16:1); what the duties of these orders were we cannot say. In Acts the church at Jerusalem is administered by a council of *presbuteroi* or elders (Acts 21:18), Paul is credited with a valedictory speech to the *presbuteroi* of Ephesus (Acts 19:17ff.), and he and Barnabas are represented as establishing *presbuteroi* in the churches that they founded (Acts 14:23). The inception of the later threefold hierarchy is sometimes traced to the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15:23, which was issued from Jerusalem in the name of the apostles, presbyters and other brethren. But if we take the apostles to be a permanent class of ministers, we must explain how Paul can claim this title for himself (1 Cor. 9:1) when his only calling is that of an itinerant evangelist. ‘Apostles’ was more probably a designation reserved for those whom Christ had set apart to preach the Gospel. Only in the pastoral epistles (often dated to the early second century) do we meet the word *episkopos* as a companion, not an alternative, to *presbuteros*. Even then the moral traits required of both are similar, and distinct responsibilities are not prescribed, unless it be that the function of an *episkopos* is to ordain the presbyters (Titus 1:5).

The precepts given to Timothy and Titus show that if the man failed to dignify the office, the office would not exonerate the man (1 Tim. 3:1; Titus 1:5–7). The first intimation that ecclesial rank should be respected for its own sake comes in the letters of Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, written *en route* to martyrdom around 110 CE. He tells the church of Tralles in Asia Minor to acknowledge ‘the bishop as a type of the Father, the presbyters as a council of God and a bond of the apostles and the deacons as Jesus Christ’ (*Trallians* 3.1). In the light of later ecclesiology it is striking that it is the presbyters, not the bishop, who have the sanction of the apostles; more striking still that Ignatius, though he is not a member of the congregation, has the authority to underwrite the primacy of its bishop. Does he possess this in a metropolitan capacity as bishop of Antioch (as in Harnack 1908: I, 463), or in his personal character as a martyr-in-waiting? The first seems most unlikely at this epoch, so it is reasonable to surmise, with Walter Bauer (1971: 60–94), that the new concept of a monarchical episcopate was not yet so well established as to prevail without a charismatic sponsor. Since Ignatius thinks it necessary to defend the bishop’s character from detraction in some localities, there is no divorce between ministerial

status and the attributes of the minister. Nor is there any sure sign that the head of the congregation is regarded as a priest. The demand that he or a surrogate should preside at the Eucharist (*Smyrnaeans* 8.1) guarantees the unity of the flock, not the efficacy of the sacrament. It is teaching, not a word of consecration – possibly then the ministry of presbyters, not the bishop – that will make the rite a ‘medicine of immortality’ to the people, for whom heresy is a ‘medicine of death’ (*Ephesians* 20.2; *Trallians* 6.2).

Denunciation of heretics is loudest in the literature and anecdotes that gathered around the memory of John. In two of the Johannine letters a single presbyter, and in the Apocalypse a single angel, are responsible for the direction of whole churches. Polycarp the autocratic and long-lived bishop of Smyrna, was supposedly John’s disciple, while in a letter by bishop Polycrates of Ephesus we read that the evangelist was a ‘sacrificing priest who wore the mitre’ (Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.31.3). Around 180, Irenaeus, presbyter or bishop of Lyons and author of the first syllabus of errors, professed to quote from John’s own lips by way of Polycarp, as well as citing the latter’s curse on Marcion (*Adversus Haereses* [*Against Heresies*] 3.3). He thus invokes on his own behalf the principle of succession or *diadoche* which, as Von Campenhausen (1969: 160) notes, was first employed to validate the teaching of philosophers in pagan schools, and then by gnostic groups to support their claim to the possession of secret gospels. Purity of doctrine could be verified, according to Irenaeus, by reference to the great centres of Christianity, any one of which could boast a line of presidents reaching back to the apostles. Such pedigrees would not suffice, however, without the consensus of the faithful, and the two converge in an enigmatic passage in which Irenaeus urges the *principalitas*, or pre-eminence, of Rome. He is urging something less than papal primacy, as Molland (1950) and Abramowski (1977) demonstrate. Nor are Catholicity and apostolicity of any weight without good conduct in the minister, which is all the more imperative when his rivals shrink from martyrdom and violate every precept of the Law. That Polycarp and Ignatius suffered martyrdom is a fact of some importance to Irenaeus, who expects that clerical rank will be united with the second and third of the charismatic types defined above.

It is often said that the first type was repressed when the magisterial church was seized by what Rowan Greer (1989) has styled a ‘fear of freedom’. The *Didache* (a manual of uncertain date and perhaps of Syrian provenance on which Audet [1958] remains authoritative) has been adduced as evidence because it contains directions for assessing the truth of prophecy and curtailing the abuse of that vocation. But of course it is where true prophets are most respected that the false ones seek disciples, and the *Didache* is so far from disparaging the prophets as a class that it declares them to be the high priests of the congregation (13.3), and grants them the right to celebrate as much of the liturgy as they desire (10.7). A prophet may betray himself by avarice, but to test him while he is speaking is the unforgivable sin (11.7). Both in the Old Testament and in the New there are admonitions against false spirits, and this document adds little to these but the axiomatic principle that a prophet ought to use his gifts for edification rather than for gain. Since Paul had already said that all must be done in order, the charismatic ministry is not deposed by making it compatible with a fixed hierarchy of bishops, priests and deacons, or with settled

forms of prayer. It would be equally tendentious to maintain that the ecstatic movement now called Montanism was opposed because the episcopate was bent on expelling prophecy (see Chapter 36 in this volume). Montanus, whose apostles received a salary (Eusebius, *H. E.* 5.18), can hardly have been intending a return to primitive Christian society. Trevett (1996, and in Chapter 36 of this volume) has stressed the role of women in the movement, but if they had set up a female clergy their detractors would have made it a charge against them, as they did against gnostic groups. In fact the indictments state that he and his followers gave easy absolution to malefactors, disseminated the cult of a spurious martyr and took money for their labours in defiance of the apostolic teaching (Eusebius, *HE* 5. 18). Whether any of this is true is not the present question; it is more germane to note that we do not hear that the veneration of martyrs is unlawful, or that prophets cannot absolve.

The heresy of the Montanists (such as it was) consisted in the imposition of fasting, chastity and novel penances on the ordinary Christian. Tertullian, the apologist of the 'new prophecy' in the early third century, argued that the world had reached its last days, in which God would pour his spirit on all humanity. Everyone was now called to lead the spiritual or 'pneumatic' life in contrast to the 'psychics', or mere natural men, as he rudely termed the representatives of the Catholic church. A similar dichotomy between psychics and pneumatics had already been drawn by gnostics, who thus agreed in one thing with Tertullian — that there cannot be common ground between Christian rectitude and ordinary standards of proficiency or merit. In his late years Tertullian was a stranger in the 'psychic' congregations, but, as Rankin (1995) reminds us, he seems never to have renounced his old conviction that the whole church is the keeper of the apostolic faith. He is certainly no free churchman in his writings, for while he believes, with scripture, that every Christian is a priest, he styles the bishop the 'highest priest', and while he appeals to prophetesses, he does not believe that women can be ordained (*De baptismo* [*On Baptism*] 17.5 etc.). At times he shows an extravagant respect for the office, even while he stigmatizes the conduct of the most distinguished prelates. One of his targets, guilty of attempting to forgive the unforgivable, is still the 'Bishop of Bishops' (*De pudicitia* [*On Modesty*] 1.6–7); another, bishop Zephyrinus of Rome, could have healed the schism of the Asiatic churches if he had only endorsed the preaching of Montanus (*Adversus Praxeum* [*Against Praxeas*] 1). This comment shows not only that an African could attribute some authority to Rome but that the episcopate in Asia was by no means so united against the 'new prophecy' as ancient and modern writers have supposed.

POPES AND COUNCILS

Rome itself, it seems, had only lately perceived the value of the monarchical episcopate. Paul and Ignatius do not know of any, and the letter ascribed to Clement, which was written from the city in the late first century, does not tell us either the name or the status of its author. He seems to use the terms 'presbyter' and 'bishop' interchangeably (*First Epistle to the Corinthians* 44. 4–5; cf. 42. 5), and while he

alludes to the priests and Levites of the Jewish Temple (32 .2), he does not equate these with the Christian orders. Unlike their Jewish counterparts, Roman leaders were not averse to new revelations, for they treasured that of Hermas, part of which was addressed to Clement (The Shepherd, *Vision* 2.4.3). The Muratorian Fragment, perhaps the earliest canon of the New Testament (*pace* Hahnemann 1992), acknowledges both this and an Apocalypse of Peter as well as John's. Hegesippus and Irenaeus both had lists of presbyters or bishops dating back to Paul and Peter (see Von Campenhausen 1960: 163–8), but only around 190 do we meet with an exertion of episcopal supremacy, making law for the sake of law. This was the decree of bishop Victor that the Roman date for Easter should be observed by Asiatics in the capital. Those who withstood him – even bishop Polycrates of Ephesus – were excommunicated; Irenaeus, who kept the Roman calendar, felt obliged to remonstrate with Victor's ruling, since the Asiatic date had been observed by the martyr-bishop Polycarp (Eusebius, *H. E.* 5.23–5).

Henceforth the Roman bishops never questioned their prerogatives, which they extended even to the remission of sins that other churchmen thought it impossible to pardon. The edict of Callistus (217–22), offering terms to penitent murderers, adulterers and apostates, caused his suffragan Hippolytus to count him among the heretics (*Refutation of All Heresies* 9). This author, in his *Apostolic Tradition*, has left an account of the liturgy and orders of at least one group of Christians in the capital. It is the earliest to distinguish between those officers whom the church appoints by regular ordination and others, such as virgins and confessors, who need no ceremony as they owe their standing to the choice of God (Chadwick and Dix 1992: 18–22). Hippolytus thus seems to have envisaged a symbiosis of the institutional and the charismatic – an inference confirmed by his stipulation that a bishop should have led an exemplary life and been elected by the laity before he is consecrated by the clergy of his own rank. These two notes of the ministry, however, were becoming more discordant in the third century as the church was vexed alternately by the horrors of persecution and the blandishments of peace. As Brent (1995) has shown, Hippolytus may not have been a rival for Callistus' chair; he is none the less a forerunner of the schism that resulted from the election of Cornelius in the Decian persecution of 251. The party of Novatian, another aspirant, denounced Cornelius' willingness to readmit lapsed Christians and set up Novatian as an antipope.

The laity always had a part to play in such disputes, for, while the initiative in clerical appointments lay with bishops, they were obliged to seek the approval of the flock. If we believe the enemies of Novatian, an unpopular schismatic would resort to desperate measures to retain his popular following. First he plied three bishops with strong liquor and induced them to participate in a charade of ordination; then, when he found that priests and congregation still refused any rank but that of presbyter he introduced new and blasphemous formalities into the eucharistic service:

Clasping the recipient's hands, he did not let go until he had sworn the following (yes, I shall give his very words): 'Swear to me on the body and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ that you will never abandon me and turn to Cornelius.'

(Eusebius, *H. E.* 6.43.18)

Cornelius, our one source for this anecdote, insinuates that Novatian led a negligible troupe, yet he also claims to have witnessed an assembly at which large numbers of the laity deserted the pretender (*H. E.* 6.43.6). It is difficult to say whether either candidate relied on the support of a particular ethnic group or social category. We might, for example, hope to find a clue in the return to the Asiatic date for Easter among Novatians (Socrates, *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.24); but this occurred in the East, long after the passing of Novatian, who was clearly no Asiatic as he wrote his theological works in Latin. Until this period Greek had been the tongue of malcontents.

The African church, more vigorous and more Latin than the Roman one at this time, sent delegates who ratified the election of Cornelius. In the eyes of its leader Cyprian, who had struggled to maintain his own position against five dissident presbyters in Carthage, the opponents of a duly-elected bishop were as bad as any heretic. In contrast to the successors of Cornelius (who no doubt found it prudent to conciliate the schismatics in their own locality), Cyprian denied that Novatian's clergy had the right to administer any of the sacraments. For the first time we find a great churchman arguing that the difference between a true and a spurious ministry can lie simply in their adherence to different principles of succession. He does not, however, hold the view of later times: that if a man has been validly ordained we take no further account of his merits or his sins. On the contrary, he avers that those who sacrifice to pagan gods have forfeited their title; that the suffrage of the people is a precondition of episcopal tenure; and even the incumbent must be free of sin if his prayers are to be heard (*Epistles* 42.1, 44.3, 65.2, 67.2, 67.5; cited by Hanson 1985: 142). The bishop of Carthage saw that enforcement of morality, lay and clerical, required a strong executive, nowhere more so than in the populous churches of North Africa. It was therefore zeal, not jealousy, that led him to put a curb on the bestowal of absolution by confessors, some of whom, with only their incarceration to show as a mark of sanctity, had won an unhealthy following by their readiness to comply with all petitions. Cyprian's elevation of the bishopric is intended not so much to restrict the priesthood to his own tier of the church as to make the whole church an assembly of the saints.

As Papa or 'Pope' of Carthage, Cyprian takes for granted the subordination of local sees to patriarchal centres; he offered no solution for a case in which the patriarchs disagree. The different policies of Rome and Carthage towards Novatian's clergy led to an altercation between their popes. Stephen of Rome assumed a plenary right of arbitration as the successor of St Peter, and the doctrine of Roman primacy was born (for the fullest narrative see Benson 1897: 118–71). Only a few years later a suit for heresy against the Alexandrian pope, Dionysius, was referred to the Roman bishop (Athanasius, *On the Opinion of Dionysius*). Even the pagan government found it expedient to promote this innovation, entrusting Rome in 271 with the choice of an incumbent to the debated see of Antioch (Eusebius, *H. E.* 7.30.19). The umbilical connection between imperial and ecclesiastical monarchy was strengthened by the accession of Constantine in 312 as the Christian emperor of the West. In the following year Miltiades, bishop of Rome, announced that a council under his presidency had acquitted the bishop of Carthage of the charges laid against him by his enemies, the 'party of Donatus'. The Donatists appealed against this 'transmarine' conspiracy,

and Constantine, at their request, convened the Council of Arles in 314 (trans. in Edwards 1997: 185–8). This proved to be a synod of the type that had already become a usual means of settling controversy in the church (Tertullian, *On Modesty* 10.2; Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* [*Life of Constantine*] 1.51). The documents from this and other councils of the period suggest that the principal object was to establish uniformity of discipline in adjacent provinces. Rome, however, felt that she had no need to be reminded of the bans on prostitutes, gladiators, actors and circus-riders that were already part of the Apostolic tradition known to Hippolytus. The session at Arles set two important precedents for the ecumenical councils, in that the emperor was present and the bishop of Rome was not.

Apart from upholding the Roman date for Easter, the prelates at Arles determined that the use of the right form, even by schismatics, was sufficient to constitute a valid baptism. Even the African Catholics endorsed this regulation when they saw that members of their own communion who migrated to the Donatists were being rebaptized. Unlike the Novatianists in Italy the Donatists of Africa raised legions of supporters; some will have been attracted by their claims to stringent purity, others by their resistance to a government that appeared to favour Romans above the native population (see Frend 1952). We have the account of an interested bystander at the riotous election of a future Donatist to the see of Cirta. According to the grammarian Victor, speaking on his oath before a magistrate, the better part of the people had resisted the election of Silvanus on the grounds that he was both a collaborator and a disturber of the peace. The mob, however, demanded him, and a retinue of gladiators and prostitutes escorted him in his triumph. Both these occupations were forbidden by the Council of Arles and many previous rulings, but the citizens could do nothing to restrain them, as they were all shut up in the Great Lodge which the church had set aside for the veneration of its martyrs (Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, Appendix 1.16; Edwards 1997: 165–6). Cirta remained a hotbed of recalcitrant Donatism for many years. Faced with this secession of the populace the Catholic polemicists confined the right of teaching and of presiding at the liturgy to bishops. The first of them, Optatus of Milevis (376 or 385) seems to doubt that even presbyters can be spokesmen for the church (*De schismate Donatarum* [*Against the Donatists*] 7.5). His argument that schism is a greater sin than heresy is endorsed in expanded versions of the *Didache* in Syriac, Greek and Latin, the longest of which is known as the *Apostolic Constitutions* (*Didache* 4.3, *Constitutions* 6.1, *Didascalia* 23). Here the threefold ministry is equated with the sacerdotal system of the Old Testament:

For these [bishops] are your high-priests, as the presbyters are your priests and your present deacons instead of your levites; so also are your readers, your scribes, your porters, your deaconesses, your widows, your virgins, your orphans; but he who is above all these is your High Priest.

(*Apostolic Constitutions* 2.25, trans. Donaldson 1870: 58)

This is not pure formalism: the writer must have been aware that orphans are not ordained, that vows alone cannot make a virgin and that the altar of Christ is older than his church. Nevertheless the currency of such writings shows that Christians of the fourth century had redefined the apostolate as a priesthood, not only to emanci-

pate the clergy from the laity but to justify an alliance with the secular authorities that was frequently invoked against both heresy and schism. Too many modern readers see here nothing but the 'rhetoric of power', but the Catholics of the time could have replied that they were defending the law of charity. Baptism by schismatics, for example, might be valid, but how could there be a Eucharist which contradicted its own proclamation of fraternal love? As always, it was the Catholics who urged that the church must be an ark for everyone, even sinners, and when Augustine argued that the Donatists should be 'compelled to enter', he was saying that the love of God extended even to those who refused the sacrament of reconciliation. Power and love for him were indissoluble in the church because they were both inseparable from divine omnipotence, and anyone who takes him for a formalist should meditate on his saying that we can have a church without bishops, but not a church without Christ (*Contra Cresconium* [*Against Cresconius*] 2.13).

We have seen that Alexandria and Carthage were prepared to submit intractable disputes to a Roman arbiter; it was quite another thing for him to intervene unasked or to pronounce upon a case that others thought themselves more competent to resolve. The other Eastern provinces were incensed by Rome's behaviour after the Council of Nicaea, which was convened by Constantine in 325. Its chief aims were to fix a date for Easter, to reconcile the Melitian schismatics of Alexandria to their bishop Alexander and to judge the orthodoxy of an Alexandrian presbyter called Arius, who refused to acknowledge Christ as God in the same sense as the Father. Attaching more importance to the last issue than their sovereign, the participants drew up a creed to exclude the position of Arius, and bishops who could not sign it were deposed. Within a few years they were reconciled to the emperor, who was ready to waive the Nicene definition. This compromise was rejected by Alexander of Alexandria and his successor Athanasius, who seems also to have exacerbated the quarrel with the Melitians (Williams 1986). His methods were tyrannical (see discussion in Chapter 44 of this volume), and after repeated trials on a series of grave indictments, he was banished by Constantius, the heir of Constantine, in 339. Though the reasons for his expulsion were political, the Easterners took advantage of his absence to devise new credal statements which admitted a greater latitude of opinion than the synod of 325.

Were they Arians? Not so, they retorted: 'We are not followers of Arius, for how could we, being bishops, follow a presbyter?' (Jonkers 1954: 57). Were they an ecumenical assembly? They were acting without the westerners, but after all the bishop of Rome had elected not to be present at Nicaea except through his silent representatives. Rome at this stage seems to have espoused no creed but the one that she professed to have received from the apostles; persuaded by Athanasius that the Easterners were now heretics, she became his protector for the next two decades, in contempt of the ancient custom which forbade the interference of one province in affairs already decided by another. An attempt to bring the East and the West together at Serdica in 343 resulted only in the creation of two antagonistic councils. The dominant voice in the West was that of Hosius of Cordova, who had been present at Nicaea; yet the principle that he spoke for was the unlimited right of Rome to hear appeals against the decrees of other bishops (Jonkers 1954: 67). In the

following years Constantius forced a series of ephemeral and superficial agreements on the church; Athanasius, however, set an example of defiance and after many vicissitudes returned to take control of his bishopric in 362. His triumph hallowed the Council of Nicaea, but did nothing to pacify a chronic schism which had now come to a head in Antioch. When Easterners of impeccable orthodoxy favoured a candidate who was not the choice of Rome, the length and intricacy of the subsequent wranglings moved at least one pious layman to throw himself on the unconditional verdict of the Apostolic See:

I know nothing of Vitalis, I repudiate Melitius, Paulinus is a stranger to me.
Anyone who does not gather with you scatters; that is to say, whoever is not of
Christ is of Antichrist.

(Jerome, *Epistle* 15.2)

Jerome, as the proponent of a new asceticism, was no natural friend to priests, and his letters abound in satire on the lazy and vicious clergy of the capital. Nor is it probable that he had discovered higher qualities in Damasus, whose pontificate commenced with a fatal riot and was overshadowed by a number of 'charismatic' figures, Jerome himself not least among them. His testimony reminds us that the call for a Papal monarchy is as likely to proceed from the zealous laity, who aspire to nothing but unity of fellowship, as from the embattled clergy, who have privileges to lose. Naturally a different form of monarchy was envisaged by the emperor Theodosius I, who in 381 convened a second ecumenical council at Constantinople. The occasion was disastrous, as the first president, Meletius of Antioch, died in office, and when Gregory of Nazianzus, bishop of Constantinople, took the chair he was rapidly deposed on a technicality, then avenged himself in exile by inveighing against the futility of councils. Rome agreed, maintaining that the Council had installed the wrong candidate in the see of Antioch. Moreover, as Greenslade (1953: 82) points out, it had insinuated that the heir of Peter owed his primacy to the metropolitan status of his city when it accorded second place to Constantinople as 'New Rome'.

Rome held her ground by annexing the decrees of Sardica to the Nicene canons. Pope Zosimus appealed to them in 418 as proof of his right to scrutinize the verdict of the African episcopate in the case of the dissolute presbyter Apiarius (Merdinger 1997: 111–35). His error was soon exposed by consultation of Eastern archives, but no such unanimity between the two halves of Christendom prevailed with regard to the teaching of the British monk Pelagius, who maintained that everyone is as free as Adam to accept or reject the saving grace of God. Zosimus acquitted him of heresy in 417, swayed perhaps by aristocrats in Italy, who espoused his high moral standards, and by the bishop of Jerusalem, who pronounced his doctrine sound in 415. The African clergy, guided by Augustine, quickly brought him to his senses: what, they asked, becomes of infant baptism if we have no doctrine of original sin? No doubt it was the baptismal controversy with the Donatists that commended such an argument to the Catholics of Africa, though the precedent had been set by Athanasius when he pointed out that Arians have no right to join in the church's prayers to Christ. In Africa (and indeed in Athanasius) the appeal to common piety is accompanied by the typical indifference of the western church to outsiders, secular or

ecclesiastical; it was all to the advantage of the papacy that the ecumenical spirit was as moribund in Carthage as in Rome.

A decade after Zosimus, Pope Celestine not only restored the harmony between Africa and Rome with his condemnation of Pelagius, but became a willing referee in a duel between Eastern primates. Alexandria could not but resent the honours that had been conferred upon the new city of Constantinople, and the ancient see sustained a further affront in 428 when its bishop, Cyril, learned that a group of monks whom he had disciplined had taken refuge in Constantinople under its patriarch Nestorius. This infringement of the Nicene canons added flame to the theological dispute – not small, as Chadwick (1951) reveals, but not yet quite unquenchable – that Nestorius had kindled by his sermon against the use of the term ‘Theotokos’, or ‘Mother of God’, for Mary. Both combatants wrote to Celestine, who might have been less hostile to Nestorius if the latter had not extended the asylum of his city to Pelagian refugees. The emperor Theodosius II was persuaded to hold a council at Ephesus in 431. The presence of Roman delegates entitles this to be reckoned as the Third Ecumenical Council, though it was far from representative, as Cyril, arriving early with his satellites, carried through the condemnation and deposition of his rival before Nestorius’ party, led by John of Antioch, could appear. The Antiochenes retaliated by deposing Cyril, and the ensuing controversy cannot be said to have run its course before the Fifth Ecumenical Council of 553.

MONKS AND PRIESTS

As is evident from the last few paragraphs, the clergy of the fourth century had to reckon with the powerful ferment of asceticism that had spread to every level of the church. Not that asceticism was a new thing, in Christianity or in the history of religions. Christ sent out his messengers with neither staff nor wallet, and in the second century the scholar Tatian, author of the first harmony of the gospels, formed a community of ‘encratites’ in Syria, whose object was to liberate the spirit from the flesh by sexual continence and fasting. Invidious comparisons with the Cynics were suggested by contemporaries as well as by Gerd Theissen (1978) and a host of modern followers; we must not forget, however, that Cynics were free itinerants without a creed or social organization, while the encratites, like all Christians, were avowedly the people of a book. Some diffidence with regard to created goods is visible even in the church of Irenaeus, where vegetarianism was practised (*Eusebius, H. E.* 5.1.26); a century later Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, tendentiously proposed that the contemplative and celibate Therapeutae described by Philo were the first Christian ascetics (*HE* 2.17.2). He also held up Origen, the most copious theologian of the third century, as a paragon of Christian self-denial (*H. E.* 6.19); though Origen’s writings do not wholly corroborate this account, they do undoubtedly recommend the atrophy of the senses and the gradual deliverance of the soul from its gross integument through moral rigour, intellectual discipline and continuous meditation on the scriptures. Origen does not reject the clergy, but he implies that it is possible to be a saint without them; and, notwithstanding the questionable validity of his own orders, he was bold enough to rebuke unfaithful clerics. The

words of this great author outpaced those of any bishop, and his posterity after Constantine included both the layman Jerome and the monk Pelagius. The former, as a spiritual gymnast to the rich women of the capital, wrote fierce tracts against opponents of virginity and fasting; followers of the latter went so far as to imply that only the celibate can possess the kingdom of God (Rees 1991: 71–87).

This cultivation of private spirituality annoyed the ministers more than it compromised the ministry. To accuse a priest or bishop of venality is not to say that we need no priests or bishops, and similar reproaches can be found in the works of great ecclesiastics of the fourth century. Origen is said to have been condemned by synods in Rome and Alexandria, but not to have revenged himself by schism; Pelagius was a heretic, but not an antipope. Nor was there any danger to the balance of society, for the movement shed its lustre only on members of the wealthy and leisured classes. Self-denial would be a ruinous luxury for those who are born to labour and who otherwise cannot command so much as the mere necessities of life. The patrons of these Christian ascetics differed only in religion from the philosophic pagans who were turning private houses into schools of mortification. To another group of Christians, however, even such high-minded worldliness appeared to be inconsistent with the gospel. Around the year 290 a certain Antony, an Egyptian of good family but little education, sold his goods to feed the poor as the Word commanded, and embraced a life of solitary prayer and meditation in the desert (see Chapter 43 of this volume). His visitors were numerous, a few remained, and very soon ‘they had made the desert a city’ (Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 14). Its denizens – chiefly men, but also women, at least in legend – received the name of *monachoi*, meaning ‘those who live alone’.

They came to pray, to chastise the flesh and to wrestle with the daemons. At the same time, in a world where the poor were serfs and the rich were prisoners to their civic obligations, the hermit had won a right to the free disposal of his person that was granted to few inhabitants of the empire. Even a little power beguiles the powerless, and as the imperial tyranny eclipsed all lesser sources of authority, the populace would sometimes turn away from the village headman, the native magistrate and even the local priests to beg a judgement or a miracle from these athletes of the spirit. Brown (1971) and Lane Fox (1997) draw formidable pictures of the most conspicuous type, the Syrian stylites, who built pillars and lived on top of them to endure the flagellation of the elements. In posthumously written lives we find them stilling heresy, receiving the tributes of ecclesiastics and establishing their own line of succession. For all that, it is not safe to conclude that holy men had supplanted priests in the estimation of the public. Biography was a literary form with its own conventions, and, just as Greek philosophers seldom boasted of the influence that their pupils constantly attributed to them, so the monks and stylites may have cut humbler figures in the world than in hagiography. Of course Susanna Elm (1994: 363–5) is right to extend the same scepticism to the *Life of Antony*, ascribed to Athanasius, in which the monks appear on the side of the episcopate. Antony displays a remarkable knowledge of the errors that have infected Egypt during his seclusion, and descends to Alexandria to denounce the Arian party at the height of its success.

If this visit took place at all, it may have been at the invitation of urban monks

who supported Athanasius. It is certainly not hard to prove that bishops of strong character had assumed the task of regulating the conduct and opinions of the monks in their vicinity. In 329, the first year of his tenure, Athanasius had visited one of the monasteries of Pachomius, new foundations in which monks, both male and female, were brought together to read the scriptures and engage in manual labour under the supervision of a single abbot. These monasteries were the watchtower of Egyptian orthodoxy throughout the life of Athanasius, and through the *Lausiac History* of Palladius became the pattern for many other 'cenobitic' or communal institutions. Bishops such as Basil of Caesarea in Cappadocia extolled the cenobitic life as more conducive to fraternal love and fruitful labour, though his own experience proved that even fellowship was no guarantee of purity in doctrine (see further Rousseau 1994: 190–232). Some, known to their judges as Messalians, were said to despise the sacraments, the body and even the God who had created them; the Eustathians, it was feared, had lent an ear to female cries for ordination and equality with men. In 343 the Council of Gangra drew up an inventory of their misdemeanours:

If any woman professing an ascetic regimen changes her attire and assumes that of a man in place of the customary female covering . . . if any woman abandons her husband and chooses the life of an anchorite, spurning marriage . . . if any woman professing an ascetic regimen cuts off her hair which God vouchsafed to her as a reminder of her subordination, as though to flout the command of subordination, let her be anathema.

(canons 13, 14 and 17, in Jonkers 1954: 83–4)

The virgin being a paradigm of Christian submission, it was only to be expected that the most vehement demands upon the obedience of the laity should occur in patriarchal admonitions to this long-established order of the church (Brakke 1995: 57–89). It is fair to remark that curbs were applied to male ascetics also, and that if the admonitions of the clergy had not been welcomed by a majority they would not have been obeyed. The church as a whole believed that it was following Pauline precept, and if this was interpreted according to the 'classic Weberian model' of coercion it was not because of a natural or generic opposition between ascetic and institutional Christianity. First of all, many clergy were ascetics and many ascetics favoured institutions. Second, the clergy were so divided in the fourth century that a conflict between a monk and a bishop seldom failed to widen into a controversy between two rival prelates. Third, it was frequently the monks who sought the intervention of the rival bishop, thus confessing that they had no power to withstand the local bishop by themselves. We must beware of quoting private feuds as palmary instances of more widespread phenomena. Thus we hear that Arsenius, an abbot who lived not far from Alexandria, detested bishop Theophilus; but after his own generation it seems that everyone detested bishop Theophilus, and the fact that he was at loggerheads even with the good Arsenius is simply one more proof of his ill desert. His persecution of the monks of Nitria is perhaps the most infamous episode of his life, but here again we are told that it arose from personal rancour, not from zeal for his episcopate; only when the Nitrians appealed to John Chrysostom in Constantinople did it become an affair of precedence, and by then the monks were almost out of view. Readers of Elizabeth Clark's fine study (1992: 43–84) will

perceive that this was more an affair of monks against monks than of monks against the episcopate: Theophilus made his friends among the so-called Anthropomorphites and his foes among their theological adversaries, the Origenists of Nitria. Athanasius, Cyril and Dioscorus are the other famous occupants of the Alexandrian see between 350 and 450, and none of them found it difficult to rally the monks of Egypt on demand.

Did the ascetic life provide a haven for the charismatic figures whom the rise of the episcopate had driven from the church? Certainly the desert saints worked miracles and saw visions that were not vouchsafed to clerics; certainly human gifts were not sufficient for the Evagrian communities who regarded the subjugation of the body as a prelude to a more exacting contest with the daemons. But even here the goal was not to manifest power but to attain humility; of the three charismatic styles defined above, the second, not the first, remained the test of sanctity, and it was equally required of monks and priests. As for the third, it is likely enough that some chose to be monks because they had lost the opportunity to be martyrs, but we have seen that ascetic practices were not uncommon even before the persecutions ceased. In the empire after Constantine there were clearly more vocations to the monastery than there had ever been to martyrdom, and the codes devised to govern them were not at first the invention of the clergy. It was for the willing laity, not for protesting supermen, that Basil and Augustine framed their rules and Epiphanius wrote his handbook of orthodoxy, the *Ancoratus*, in 373 CE. Nor was it impossible for a monk to become a bishop, like Theodoret of Cyrrhus, or for bishops to emulate the feats of monks. The *Life of Epiphanius* is a catalogue of miracles, notwithstanding his long tenure of the episcopate of Salamis in Cyprus. It reminds us that the bishops of this era yielded to none in their ability to draw a crowd, to generate hagiography and to overawe the mighty; if that is what it means to be charismatic, then it is not the monks but Ambrose, Basil, Chrysostom, Epiphanius and Augustine who are the charismatic spokesmen of their age.

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CHRISTIAN REGIONAL DIVERSITY



David G. K. Taylor

INTRODUCTION

For much of the world's population, regardless of confession, Christianity is self-evidently a European religion. In some accounts Christ's birth in the Middle East appears almost to be an aberration, for his Gospel was promulgated in Greek, 'a European language', and the formulation and development of Christian doctrine and practice was apparently the work of European – Latin- or Greek-speaking – theologians. The expansion of Christianity beyond its European heartlands is usually thought to be the consequence of European missionary activity or colonialism, or a combination of the two, and it is often presumed that this occurred in recent centuries. The agents of this expansion, the Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant churches, are all portrayed as Christian denominations of European origins, and Christianity is often considered to be restricted to these groups. Thus Christians in the Middle East have become used to being told to 'go home' to Europe, and those in India are frequently accused of not being 'real Indians'.

The truth however, is far more complex and far more interesting. The first monarch to convert to Christianity was not the Roman emperor Constantine but the Armenian king Trdat. Bardaisan of Edessa, a second-century Christian philosopher, albeit of dubious orthodoxy, could contrast the true Christian philosophy practised in Syria with the barbaric customs of the pagan Gauls, Britons and Germans; by the late fourth century Christianity was flourishing in Syria, Asia Minor, Armenia, Georgia, Persia, Arabia, Egypt and North Africa, Ethiopia and South India, and by the seventh century, when Christianity was being re-established in Britain (and had not yet reached large areas of northern Europe), the Christians of Persia had already expanded through Central Asia and consecrated their first monastery in the imperial capital of China.

Little of this, however, will be found in the standard handbooks to early Christianity, regardless of denominational origin, for they nearly all take a eurocentric view of early Christianity that considers churches located at the periphery of the Roman empire to be historically and theologically marginal. Influential theologians from outlying provinces, such as the Africans Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine, Cyril, and the Coptic-speaking Athanasius, and those from Asia Minor and the

Middle East, such as the Cappadocians Basil the Great and the two Gregories, as well as Irenaeus and Eusebius, have all been given European identities, implicitly or explicitly, although many of them grew up according to local customs, speaking local languages, and only subsequently acquired their Greek or Latin through education. To these must be added the major theologians and thinkers who wrote in their native tongues and so have simply been ignored: Ephrem, Aphrahat, Jacob of Serug, Narsai, Babai, Shenoute, Yovhannes Mandakouni, Eznik of Kolb, and many more. In recent years this deplorable situation has slowly begun to improve, and some figures (most notably the Syriac poet and theologian Ephrem – see Chapter 49 of this volume) are more frequently mentioned, but there is still much work to be done before it will be generally thought odd that so much of early Christianity should be passed over in silence or given very restricted attention.

In what follows I have attempted to provide some account of the geographical expansion of Christianity beyond the regions bordering on the Mediterranean, and then to suggest some ways in which these Christian groups and their practices and beliefs challenge our own understanding of Christianity, both ancient and contemporary.

CHRISTIAN GEOGRAPHICAL DIVERSITY

The early history of the expansion of Christianity is rarely well documented, and this is certainly the case when one turns to examine its progress at the furthest limits of the Roman empire and beyond. In the New Testament Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline epistles we learn of the missionary journeys of the early disciples throughout the Mediterranean lands, and of their rapid successes in the East. Although the numbers of converts to Christianity were no doubt rather limited at first, it is clear that two major missionary centres were quickly established: Antioch, where the followers of Jesus first received the name ‘Christians’ (Acts 11.26), in the north of ancient Syria (now Antakya, southern Turkey), and Alexandria in Egypt in the south. It is from these bases that missionaries set out to convert much of the ancient world.

Antioch and the East

Syria

According to tradition the first bishop of Antioch was Peter, who remained there for seven years, 33–40 CE, before moving on to Rome where he was martyred. Peter was succeeded by a series of key theologians and church leaders (e.g. Ignatius, Serapion, John Chrysostom) under whom Christianity, over a period of centuries, slowly but steadily spread from the great metropolis into neighbouring cities, towns, and countryside. One of the most influential of these cities, and a major missionary centre in its own right, was Edessa (modern Urfa in South-east Turkey). The majority language in Edessa was Syriac (a dialect of Aramaic), the language spoken throughout the rural areas of the Middle East, and by many in the ‘Hellenistic’

cities, and the use of this Eastern 'lingua franca' gave Edessene missionaries a distinct advantage.

The origins of Christianity in Edessa itself are less than clear, however. A much discussed legendary account of the first conversions in Edessa, the *Doctrina Addai*, tells of the Edessene king, Abgar, receiving reports of Christ's persecution in Jerusalem and offering him sanctuary in his palace in Edessa. Christ writes a gracious reply thanking Abgar but declining his offer – since his duty was to remain in Jerusalem and fulfil his Father's will – and promising to send one of his apostles after his death. In due course Addai arrived, preached the gospel, healed the king of an affliction, and converted many to Christ. It is now thought that this text in fact dates to the fourth or early fifth century, drawing upon older traditions, and that it was composed by Christians in Edessa at that time to disguise the fact that for many centuries the orthodox Christians had been only a minority (nicknamed the 'Palutians' after an early bishop, Palut) amongst many competing Christian groups, such as the followers of Marcion, Mani and Bardaisan. This was certainly still the case in the fourth century, as Ephrem attests, but by then the balance was clearly changing in favour of the orthodox. Factors that contributed to this growth were veneration of three local martyrs (Shmona, Gurya and Habbib) from the late third and early fourth century; the arrival of refugees, including Ephrem, from the city of Nisibis (east of Edessa) in 363 when it was ceded by the Romans to the Persians; Ephrem's own efforts to win people over to orthodoxy through his charitable activities and his hugely influential and popular hymns; the organizational and political skills of tough bishops such as Rabbula (d. 435); the quality of the preachers and theologians produced by the theological school, and the energy and commitment of the great numbers of local monks and ascetics. For centuries to come Edessa produced some of the greatest theologians of the Eastern Christian world (and so left us an enormously rich body of theological literature) and, because it was a major centre for translation (Cyril of Alexandria, d. 444, sent a copy of his *De recte fide* there for immediate translation and distribution), it achieved great influence as a city where East and West could meet and exchange ideas. In the fifth and sixth centuries Edessa became a centre of resistance to the Christology advocated by the Council of Chalcedon (451), and it was one of its sixth-century bishops, Jacob Baradaeus (d. 578), that preserved the Syrian Orthodox church from extinction through Chalcedonian persecution. (Not surprisingly many Syrian Christians welcomed the seventh-century Arab Muslim invaders as liberators from the rulers of Constantinople.) Missionaries from Edessa were active both in the villages and towns of western Syria, and in the East in the Persian empire and in Armenia.

Persian empire

The Acts of the Apostles (2.9) mentions the presence of 'Parthians, Medes, and Elamites' at the miraculous Pentecost in Jerusalem, and from these small beginnings the church in the Persian empire had grown by 235 CE to include approximately twenty bishops and eighteen dioceses. This may have been the result of conversions amongst the Jews of the western province of Adiabene, or a consequence of Christians crossing international borders in order to seek refuge from Roman persecution,

but their numbers were further boosted by the transportation to Persia in 256 and 260 of Roman citizens from Antioch and its surrounding provinces who had been taken captive by Shah Shapur I during his military campaigns. These included many Christian laypeople and clergy (one of whom was the bishop of Antioch, Demetrius), and they contributed to the growing confidence and organization of the Persian church. Unfortunately, Constantine's espousal of Christianity in 312 left Persian Christians open to the charge that they owed greater allegiance to their co-religionist the Roman Caesar rather than to their lawful Shah. This was quickly exploited by the Zoroastrian clergy, and after a series of short-lived persecutions of Christians in the early decades of the fourth century there was a prolonged persecution from 340–79 under Shah Shapur II. At least 16,000 Christians are thought to have died, and the martyr acts celebrating their faith and courage achieved a wide circulation not only in the East but throughout Europe. In this time of crisis the Persian church managed to produce one of the greatest theologians of early Christianity, Aphrahat 'the Persian sage'. An ascetic and bishop he composed 23 homilies which reflect a profound spirituality and a biblically based theology, whose value and significance is slowly coming to be appreciated in the West. Further short periods of persecution were to occur in the fifth and sixth centuries, but the church in Persia steadily grew in size and confidence. In 424 a local synod asserted the autonomy of the Persian Catholicos and although the title 'patriarch of the East' was not formally adopted by the Catholicos until 498, it is clear that the Persian Christians no longer accepted the authority of the Patriarch of Antioch. This split from their western co-religionists was widened after 489 when the Roman authorities closed the great theological school of Edessa because of its pronounced sympathies for the theology of Theodore of Mopsuestia. (Theodore, whose brilliant writings – the basis of much Syrian biblical exegesis – were formally condemned in the West at the Council of Constantinople in 553, was held responsible for the Christology of his far less gifted pupil Nestorius, who had been condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431.) The former students and staff simply slipped across the border into the Persian empire and refounded the school in Nisibis. Although their church was not labelled 'Nestorian' by Roman Christians until the seventh century, these events marked a break with the Christian churches of the Roman empire, and whilst theologically driven it must have had real political advantages. It is worth noting that when Shah Khusrau launched his devastating attack on the Roman empire in 603 he was accompanied by the patriarch of the East, Sabrisho I, who daily beseeched Christ for a Persian victory over the Romans.

The Persian church was one of the most successful missionary churches in history. Before their separation from the Syrian Orthodox they were responsible for planting Christianity in Arabia, and by the fourth century there appear to have been bishoprics in Basra, Kufa, Qatar, and throughout Oman and Yemen. With the rise of Islam, Christianity began to recede in Arabia, but as late as 676 there is known to have been a church synod in the south. Syriac-speaking Christianity reached Kerala in southern India at a very early date. According to traditions preserved in the apocryphal Acts and in local songs it was first taken there by the Apostle Thomas in 52 CE. In any case it was firmly established within the next two centuries, and is still flourishing there today. About 530 the famous traveller Cosmas Indicopleustes (a

member of the Persian church) reports having met bishops in Bombay, Kerala, and Ceylon, and other members of his church along the coast of Bangladesh, Thailand and South China. Further north the Persian church had major successes amongst the Turks and Huns of central Asia by the fifth century. Travelling east by the Silk Road and other routes they reached central China, and in the early seventh century they were given permission by the emperor Tai-Tsung to build monasteries and preach throughout his empire.

Armenia and Georgia

Apostolic origins have also been claimed for Christianity in Armenia – whether Addai who is said to have travelled here from Edessa, or Bartholomew who is a later addition to the tradition – but in any case Christians were sufficiently numerous in Armenia by c. 200 for their reputation to have reached Tertullian in Africa. The presence of numerous theological words of Syriac origin in Armenian and the early use of Syriac biblical texts in the region strongly suggests that the earliest missionaries came from Edessa and Syria (this influence – continued later through Syriac schools, patristic texts translated from Syriac, and the celebrated activities of monks such as ‘Daniel the Syrian’ – appears to have been considerable). The turning point for Christianity in Armenia, however, came with the conversion (by 311) of King Trdat III, when it was declared the official state religion. Trdat was converted by Gregory ‘the Illuminator’, an Armenian noble who had been converted in Cappadocia, and then (c. 288) returned to preach the gospel. After 13 years in gaol he healed Trdat from a bout of insanity and was subsequently freed. In 314 he was consecrated Catholicos of the Armenians in the city of Caesarea, Cappadocia, and so began a steady process of ‘Hellenization’ of Armenian Christianity. The division of Armenia in 387 into a large region within the Persian empire and a far smaller area within the Roman led to de facto independence for the Armenian church. Soon after, c. 400, a former state official turned ascetic named Mashtots created a new alphabet, allowing the Armenian language to be written down for the first time. He travelled in the Eastern provinces of the Roman empire with students versed in Syriac and Greek, and they produced numerous Armenian translations of theological texts, and the new alphabet plus these translations provided the stimulus for the creation of a rich native literature. Noteworthy amongst the earliest examples of this literature are the *Stromateis* attributed to St Gregory, the homilies of John Mandakouni, the *Refutation of Sects* of Eznik of Kolb, and a series of invaluable chronicles attributed to Agathangelos, Moses Chorenatsi, and Elishe amongst others. Although the Armenian church had accepted the first three ecumenical councils they were at war with their Persian overlords in 451 and so did not attend Chalcedon. At the first Council of Dvin in 506 they rejected the Christological formula of Chalcedon and accepted the Henotikon of the emperor Zeno, and at the second Council of Dvin in 555 they formally condemned the imperial church and allied themselves with the Syrian Orthodox and other ‘monophysites’.

The Georgians, Caucasian neighbours of the Armenians, began to convert to Christianity in the second and third centuries, and again it was the conversion of their monarch, Mirian, in either 326 (so church tradition) or 337 (so many histor-

ians) that marked the acceleration of the process. Because of its location on the Black Sea, Georgia was influenced by contacts with churches in Armenia (Mashtots, fresh from creating the Armenian alphabet, created a Georgian alphabet in *c.* 410); Persia (Georgian bishops attended a synod in Selucia in 419); and Constantinople itself (in western Georgia the liturgy was conducted in Greek). Although the Georgians agreed to the condemnation of Chalcedon at the first Council of Dvin in 506, by the end of the sixth century they had begun to assert their independence of the Armenian church, and under Catholicos Kyrion (585–610) they finally returned to communion with Constantinople and the Chalcedonian Orthodox. Georgian monks and scholars were later to play a major role in the history of monasticism throughout the Holy Land and on Mount Sinai.

Alexandria and the south

Egypt

The Coptic church (its name is ultimately derived from the Greek name for Egypt) traces its origins to the preaching of the evangelist Mark who was traditionally martyred in Alexandria in 68 CE, although it also treasures the memory of the Holy family seeking refuge in Egypt from King Herod. From papyri and other manuscripts it is clear that Christianity was well established in Egypt by the early second century, chiefly amongst the Greek-speaking residents of the cities and large towns, rather than among the Egyptian, Coptic-speaking, peasants. Given Alexandria's intellectual reputation in the ancient world, it is not surprising that in the late second century the famous Didascalium (or catechetical school) was founded there and was associated with such intellectual giants of the early church as Clement and Origen (or that Egypt also became associated with such rival groups as the gnostics and Manichaeans). By the end of the third century Egypt had about a hundred bishoprics, but this number greatly increased in the following centuries as Christianity expanded rapidly amongst the rural population. This was probably due to several factors, such as Constantine's edict of toleration in 313; the creation of a simple Coptic alphabet, based on the Greek alphabet, in the mid-third century that allowed Egyptian translations of the scriptures to circulate; and above all the popular enthusiasm for asceticism and monasticism (both eremitism, associated with Anthony [see Chapter 43 of this volume], who was born *c.* 250, and communal cenobitism, founded by Pachomius in *c.* 320). Almost all Egyptian centres of population were within reach of a monastery, and so the monks, through their emphasis on spirituality and profound mysticism, exercised an extraordinary influence on the ordinary people from whom they were themselves drawn. In the fifth century the Egyptian church produced a series of major theologians who played a significant role internationally: namely Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, and Dioscoros, as well as the great monastic writer Shenoute of Atripe. The Copts, particularly in the monasteries, fiercely rejected the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon in 451, and this led to a power struggle with the imperial church and its supporters in Alexandria. The non-Chalcedonian party was finally able to claim victory only with the Arab invasion of Egypt in 641 that severed all Byzantine influence in their country.

Coptic (and Greek) missionaries travelled up the Nile to Nubia (modern Sudan), an ancient civilization with strong links to Egypt, and by the fifth century there was already a significant Christian presence there. It was from the sixth and seventh centuries, however, that Christian Nubian culture really flourished, and the translation of texts into Nubian and the building of monasteries and churches increased. Native Nubian Christianity survived until the early sixteenth century when the last Christian kingdom passed into Muslim control.

Ethiopia

Now the largest of the Oriental Orthodox churches, the origins of Christianity in Ethiopia date back to the mid-fourth century when two Syrian brothers from Tyre, Frumentius and Edesius, were shipwrecked in the Red Sea and enslaved in the ancient Ethiopian kingdom of Aksum. At this time Aksum was the major political power in the Red Sea region and under the leadership of its greatest king, Ezana, it not only had substantial African territories but also ruled parts of Southern Arabia. (Over many centuries Ethiopia had received waves of immigrants from Arabia who had intermarried with the local people and produced a distinctive new nation that drew upon its African and Arabian heritage, and also maintained strong contacts with the Greek-speaking cultures of the Mediterranean. Thus Ezana erected an extraordinary series of obelisks, some more than 100 feet high, engraved with inscriptions in Ethiopic, South Arabian and Greek.) The two Syrian captives became tutors to the royal family and used the opportunity to preach the gospel. King Ezana converted to Christianity (as can be seen from the new inscriptions he placed on his coins) and sent Frumentius to Alexandria where the great Athanasius consecrated him bishop of Aksum, and sent him back to continue his work. It seems likely that further missionaries followed him for, amongst others, the Ethiopian church venerates the 'nine saints', monks from the Roman empire and probably Syrians, who came to Ethiopia in the fifth century and founded many new monasteries. In 525 the Ethiopian king, Ella Asbeha, invaded Arabia to avenge a massacre of Christians at Najran, and from quotations from the Psalms found in his victorious inscriptions it is clear that at least parts of the Bible had been translated into Ethiopic by this time. The Ethiopian church, because of the early influence from Syria and the more enduring influence from Coptic Egypt, rejected the teachings of the Council of Chalcedon, but little else is known of its early history. In part this is due to a catastrophic invasion by Muslim Somali armies in the first half of the sixteenth century which, although eventually defeated, led to the destruction of innumerable monasteries and churches and the loss of much of the Ethiopian literary heritage and historical records.

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

It is impossible to do justice to the extraordinarily rich theological traditions produced by these numerous churches stretched across the Eurasian landmass, India and Africa, but in what follows I have selected just a few limited areas of interest.

Biblical Diversity

Because those churches which flourished in Europe, before expanding elsewhere, agree almost entirely on the identity of the books contained within the Bible (the only minor disagreement concerns the authority of certain texts found in the Greek but not in the Hebrew Old Testament, which Catholics refer to as Deuterocanonical and Protestants as Apocryphal writings), it is often forgotten that for most of the period of the early church the concept of a canon of authoritative scriptural texts, and the listing of those texts, was only slowly developing. Not surprisingly, then, there was much regional variation in the texts which were authorized for reading in church, and some of these alternative canons have been preserved in certain churches until the present. Churches beyond the Greek-speaking cities of the East, or the Latin West, were also quick to translate biblical texts into their own local languages – often on multiple occasions, producing a variety of local versions. These two factors, canon and translation, exercised a profound influence on both the development of dogmatic theology and Christian spirituality.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of an extended biblical canon is to be found in Ethiopia, where there are generally stated to be 81 books in the biblical canon. Rather confusingly, however, these are variously calculated. One canon has 46 Old Testament books and 35 (as opposed to the European 27) New Testament books, whereas another reckons these figures to be 54 and 27 respectively. Amongst the additional Old Testament texts are the books of Enoch and Jubilees – translations of ancient Jewish texts once popular amongst Jews and Christians alike (indeed Enoch is cited in Jude 14–15) but which now survive in their entirety only in Ethiopic. The expanded New Testament canon includes all the books accepted in Europe, plus the ‘Shepherd of Hermas’; the four-part ‘Sinodos’, a collection of prayers and instructions relating to church order which is attributed to Clement of Rome; ‘Clement’, a collection of texts not known outside of Ethiopia which are said to have been passed to Clement by the apostle Peter; the two-part ‘Book of the Covenant’, which is divided into a collection of materials relating to church order and a post-resurrection address by Christ to his disciples; and finally the Ethiopic ‘Didascalia’.

Although less dramatic, Syria also possesses a different canon and it is also significant because it was one of the first regions to produce local Bible versions: the Old Testament was translated into Syriac, possibly by Jews, although the version was quickly adopted by the local Christians, by the end of the second century and came to be known as the Peshitta. It is the local New Testament canon that is particularly of interest, however. In an early fifth-century text, the *Doctrina Addai*, which presents a spurious account of the local origins of Christianity but nevertheless embodies many early traditions, the apostle Addai instructs his followers about the texts which they may read:

The Law and the Prophets and the Gospel from which you read every day before the people, and the Epistles of Paul which Simon Cephas sent us from the city of Rome, and the Acts of the Twelve Apostles which John the son of Zebedee sent us from Ephesus – from these writings you shall read in the Churches of the Messiah, and besides them nothing else shall you read.

From this list it will be noticed that the Catholic Epistles (both the major epistles James, 1 Peter, and 1 John, plus the minor epistles 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude) as well as the Book of Revelation are missing. By the time the New Testament Peshitta version was produced (by the early fifth century, at the latest) the major Catholic epistles had been included, but the minor Catholic epistles and Revelation continued to be omitted, and are still not included in the canon of the church of the East which was geographically (and from the late-fifth century doctrinally) isolated in the Persian empire. In the western Syrian Orthodox church the minor Catholic epistles and Revelation were first translated into Syriac in the sixth century, but their usage still remained very limited. (Revelation was translated into Armenian by the fifth century, but only became part of the New Testament canon at the end of the twelfth century, and was not translated into Georgian until the tenth century.) From the writings of fourth-century theologians such as Ephrem it would appear that in his time the epistle to Philemon was not considered canonical, unlike the third epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (part of the apocryphal Acts of Paul) which was included in his commentary on the Pauline epistles, and which remained very popular in Armenia where it was printed as an appendix to the standard critical edition of the Armenian Bible.

From the citation of the *Doctrina Addai* given above, it will also be noticed that only one 'Gospel' is referred to. This is not merely shorthand for the Gospel of Christ preserved in the four books of the Evangelists, but reflects the fact that in much of Syria and Armenia the earliest gospel in circulation in the local languages was the Diatessaron, or gospel-harmony, of Tatian (a native of Syria who had been educated in Rome as a student of Justin Martyr, but returned home c. 172). The Diatessaron became very popular amongst missionaries spreading the Christian faith throughout the East, and so was the obvious choice of gospel text for Ephrem's commentary. Even after the fifth century, when bishops such as Theodoret of Cyrrhus and Rabula of Edessa sought out and destroyed hundreds of copies in their sees – replacing them with copies of the separate gospels – other copies of the Diatessaron remained in use and became the basis of translations into Persian and Arabic which still survive today.

These alternative canons and texts had a profound effect on the development of local theology. To note just one example, in Tatian's Diatessaron John the Baptist's diet (cf. Matt. 4:4) is said to consist not of 'locusts and wild honey' but of 'milk and honey'. Not only does this remove the difficulty for some early Christians of the great proto-ascetic eating meat, but by replacing it with the food promised to the children of Israel Tatian has underlined the typological link – found in various early Christian sources – between entry into the promised land and Christian baptism. A small detail becomes the stimulus for theological reflection. On a larger scale, imagine Christianity without the book of Revelation – whose real authorship has long been debated – which, it could be argued, has encouraged an unhealthy interest in millennialism and an obsession with the last things, or imagine the theological impact (not to mention the practical advantages for evangelists) of having a single unified gospel hallowed by age and tradition.

Christian diversity and Judaism

The relationship of nascent and early Christianity to contemporary Judaism is a complex question that still taxes scholarship. In recent years, particularly since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, historians have become increasingly aware of the variety of 'Judaisms' that existed in the early centuries of the common era, and the significance of this for our understanding of the factors that led to the rise and growth of Christianity. Very few, however, have stopped to consider the implications of the existence of a large variety of 'Christianities', each enriched by different legacies from their Jewish forebears. Some of these Jewish traditions and practices are very striking to those who are only familiar with western Christianity, and have led many Europeans either to regard them with contempt or to suggest that they are relics of 'primitive Christianity' (with both the positive and negative connotations that that phrase carries). Again, neither approach is truly satisfactory. Nor should it be forgotten that whilst there are some examples of peaceful Christian co-existence with local Jewish communities in the period and regions being discussed (as perhaps in Georgia), Judaism was more usually, as in the rest of the Christian world, the target of vicious polemic and diatribes. Even so saintly and gentle a figure as the Syrian Ephrem — often cited as the key representative of 'Semitic Christianity' — reveals a dark side to his character when discussing the Jews.

The origins of Jewish influence on local forms of Christianity are variously explained. Some look to the various semi-legendary accounts of the origins of Christianity in these regions. Just as the apostle Paul is recorded as having travelled and preached to the Jewish communities in the major cities of the Roman empire, so too many of the early missionaries who travelled beyond the imperial frontiers are said to have been assisted by local Jewish communities. In Syriac legends the apostle Addai is said to have made his base in Edessa in the home of a local Jewish merchant Tobiah, and according to the *Life of St Nino* the first disciples of this evangelist of Georgia, a prophetess from Cappadocia, were eight Jewish women, and the first Christian priest in Georgia was Abiathar, a local Jewish *koben*. The great Ethiopic *Kebra Nagast*, 'the Glory of the Kings', goes even further and tells how the Queen of Sheba visited King Solomon in Jerusalem and became pregnant with her son Mene-lik. On their return to Ethiopia they are said to have carried the Ark of the Covenant with them, and thus to have prepared the ground for the much later evangelization of their empire.

Whatever the historical value of these stories, the reality and influence of traditions communicated by Jewish converts to Christianity, or by early theological contact between Jewish and Christian communities, is clearly evident. Consider the case of early Syriac Christianity. Here the influence of Jewish exegetical traditions is widespread. At the simplest level this is manifested in the text of Genesis 8:4 in both the Syriac Peshitta and the Jewish Targumim where the name of the mountain upon which Noah's ark came to rest is not Mount Ararat (in Eastern Turkey) but Mount Qardu (i.e. Judi Dagħ in northern Iraq) — which should perhaps give pause for thought to the numerous pseudo-archaeological expeditions that so regularly go prospecting for the ark on Ararat! Some exegetical traditions appear to have been communicated outside the biblical text. For example, the book of Genesis (4:4) does

not state how Cain and Abel knew that only the latter's sacrifice had been accepted by God. Aphrahat 'the Persian Sage', however, writing in the fourth century, has preserved a tradition that he saw fire descend from heaven and consume Abel's offering, as have various Jewish writers of different periods. Of far greater theological significance in Syriac Christianity is the belief that Adam and Eve were clothed in robes of light or robes of glory when in Paradise, and that these were then stripped off as a consequence of the Fall. The origin of this tradition is to be found in rabbinic exegesis of Genesis 3:21 where a minority opinion holds that the reference is to their pre-expulsion clothing. Furthermore, one rabbi is reported to have owned a copy of the Torah which read 'garments of light' instead of 'garments of skin/leather' (a difference of one letter in Hebrew). This apparently innocuous textual variant became the basis of an entire soteriological system in Syriac thought. Since humanity had lost its original robes of glory at the Fall, the Son of God became incarnate in order to return them. At his baptism Christ placed them in the waters of the Jordan (which according to the Diatessaron was immediately covered with a blaze of fire or dazzling light) so that all Christians might put them on again at their own baptism (for in Syriac thought at baptism all Christians share in Christ's original baptism in the Jordan). Although invisible to our eyes here on earth, they will be revealed in their full splendour once their recipients are deemed worthy to enter heaven.

Jewish traditions and even practices are not restricted to the Syrian Christians, but in some instances it is not clear whether these are due to a direct inheritance from Jewish forebears, or are in fact the harmonization of pre-Christian practices with Old Testament models. The Armenian Christians, for example, continued the practice of offering both cereal and animal sacrifices (bulls, sheep, and fowl) to God, particularly at Easter (the Christian alternative to Pesah /Passover), at the great festivals, and in commemoration of the souls of the deceased. Armenian tradition traces this practice back to the injunctions of Gregory the Illuminator who is said to have given permission for sacrifices as a dispensation for the many pagan priests who had been led to Christianity but were concerned about providing for their families if the sacrificial system were to be abolished. Most subsequent Armenian commentators have been keen to emphasize that these sacrifices continue the sacrificial tradition of Abel, Noah and Abraham, but at the same time deny either that they are still following the Old Covenant that has been superseded by the New or that they have been 'corrupted' by Jewish customs. Instead they are adhering to a biblical practice endorsed by the apostle of Armenia. As a twelfth-century writer (Nerses Shnorhali) put it, 'if other Christian peoples are not accustomed to follow the same usage, that is no reason why any one should abuse ours'.

In Ethiopia the variety of practices with clear Jewish parallels is even more striking and has led many to argue that they are the heirs of early Jewish converts. From the earliest times the Ethiopians have practised male circumcision on the eighth day after birth; they strictly observed the Sabbath, refraining from all work (as well as celebrating on the following day, the Christian 'great Sabbath'); they kept many of the rules relating to ritual cleanliness, and did not eat any of the forbidden foods such as hares, camels, fish without fins and scales, or even the sinew of the thigh (Gen. 32:33). There was a particular horror for pork, as is made clear in an Ethiopian saying: 'Pork taints not only him who eats it, but also him who hears about

it.' Although some of these practices were played down in official church documents in recent centuries, when they became the cause of bitter attacks and criticisms by ignorant European missionaries, they continued to play a central role in Ethiopian Christian life. Particularly fascinating is the central role of replicas of the Ark of the Covenant (Ethiopic *tabot*, plural *tabotat*) in church worship. As was mentioned above, tradition states that the original Ark of the Covenant was stolen from Jerusalem by the Queen of Sheba and taken to Ethiopia where it was treasured throughout the ages and rests now, some say, at Aksum. In every church in Ethiopia, at its very heart, the holy of holies, lay a copy of the original Ark (or copies in wood or stone of the tablets of the law which the original Ark contained) and these *tabotat* were (and are) solemnly led in procession around the church, accompanied by singing and dancing *dabtara* (the Ethiopian equivalent of the Levites who are an essential part of the liturgy, with a particular responsibility for chanting hymns and psalms, but are not ordained). There are clear echoes here of 2 Sam. 6:5, 14–16 where King David and the people of Israel dance and make merry around the Ark. This again raises the difficult issue of whether these practices are due to early Jewish influence or are a consequence of the veneration accorded to the Old Testament by the Ethiopians not only in word – as in European Christianity, which has so often seemed embarrassed by and neglectful of these ancient texts – but also by imitation and adherence.

Theological diversity

Whereas modern scholarship has divided itself into self-contained sub-disciplines, with classically trained scholars focusing on Greek and Latin patristic texts and a small band of 'orientalists' attempting to tackle the rest, in the ancient world there was a constant stream of texts and ideas flowing from one region to another, with Syrians influencing Greeks and Indians, Greeks influencing Georgians and Ethiopians. Not surprisingly, then, there is a great body of theological literature which is common to many of the different church traditions and literatures, and more which whilst particular to a specific regional literature draws upon common approaches and principles. Nevertheless a study of early Christian literatures reveals much that is not only intrinsically of great value and aesthetically pleasing, but which challenges our preconceived paradigms of theological discourse. Indeed, some texts challenge our very understanding of orthodoxy – and I am not simply referring to the fact that many of the non-Greek and non-Latin-speaking churches were condemned as heterodox by theologians in the West. Take, for example, the second- or third-century Odes of Solomon, which circulated in Syriac and Greek, and which have both attracted and repelled scholars since their rediscovery in the early twentieth century. The oft-quoted nineteenth Ode begins as follows:

A cup of milk was offered to me,
and I drank it in the sweetness of the kindness of the Lord.
The Son is the cup,
and he who was milked is the Father,
and she who milked him is the Holy Spirit.
Because his breasts were full, and it was undesirable that

his milk should be spilt to no purpose,
the Holy Spirit opened her bosom,
and mingled the milk of the two breasts of the Father . . .
The womb of the Virgin took it,
and she received conception and gave birth.

Although critics have argued that such lines must have been the product of gnostics, it is now generally accepted that the Odes were produced by orthodox Syrian Christians, who made creative use of biblical imagery and their own theological traditions. In early Syriac thought, for example, the Holy Spirit was feminine (as here), and there was also clearly an awareness that in several Old Testament passages God was given feminine as well as masculine attributes. The result is a text that would seem radical even to modern theologians and has much to tell us.

The use of poetry as a vehicle for theological expression is also a striking feature of the Odes, and it is in fact characteristic of some of the most powerful examples of early Syriac literature. The most famous Syriac poet is without doubt Ephrem, c. 306–73 (about whom more can be read in Chapter 49). Ephrem organized choirs of women to sing his compositions as a practical means of disseminating orthodox teachings and combating heresy, but this was not the main reason for his choice of poetry as the primary vehicle for theology. Ephrem believed that God so far surpassed human comprehension that he could not conceivably be approached or restricted by the philosophical formulae and definitions so beloved of Greek-speaking theologians. Nor could religious truth, by nature dynamic and multilayered, be fully expressed in prose with its many limitations. Only poetry, with its multivalent images and its ability to communicate differently to each reader on each reading, was capable of hinting at these realities. It was also the perfect means of articulating Ephrem's sacramental understanding of creation, according to which God, by placing his symbols and types throughout nature and the Bible, had revealed aspects of the divine to those who approached them with the eye of faith.

In recent years Ephrem's theology has come to be widely appreciated by European readers, although a hundred years ago it was still being rubbished. That same process is only now beginning with the greatest of Coptic writers, Shenoute of Atripe (late fourth to mid-fifth century), many of whose works are yet to be fully edited. In the past he has often been attacked as possessing no Christology, but more recent studies show quite the reverse, that he is profoundly Christ-centred and that in his theological and spiritual texts he strove to emphasize the reality and glory of Christ's humanity against those who denied it entirely, or sought to ignore it by concentrating exclusively on Christ as *nous* or *logos*, the divine Christ. Intimately involved with this was his encouragement of the faithful to utter the simple prayer 'Jesus' at all significant moments of life, whether in response to joyful or sad events, moments of testing or triumph. Because Ephrem and Shenoute do not conform to European patterns of theological expression they have both been denigrated for too long, and it is we who have been the losers. It is time for Christians world-wide to acknowledge that whilst European Christianity represents one theologically rich offshoot of the early church it does not have a monopoly in the interpretation of the divine self-revelation. In a time of great change we may have much to learn from

other branches of Christianity that have successfully preserved and taught their faith through long centuries and to diverse cultures.

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MONASTICISM



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WAYS OF APPROACH

Most early monastic Christians are inaccessible to us. A few of them wrote or were written about, and some lived in places accessible to modern archaeological excavation. Their greatest monument is the living monastic tradition that claims their insights to be its foundation. The search for early monastic traces is hindered by the apologetics and polemics that have often distorted the study of early Christian monasticism. Until very recently, historical investigations typically were coloured by the religious intentions of scholars who sought to vindicate, to criticize or to dismiss monastic traditions. Ascetics were portrayed as heroic nonconformists, as deluded fanatics (most famously by Gibbon), as social misfits, or as docile loyalists. Both Martin Luther's rejection of monastic vows and the Roman defence of them turned on evidence alleged from early monastic texts.

In the nineteenth century monasticism was subjected to the same critical analysis as the Bible, and scepticism about authorship and reliability of texts abounded (Heussi 1936: 1–10). More recently, the religious agenda of earlier scholarship has yielded to social and cultural analysis since 'asceticism', a category including monastic figures and movements, has become a surprisingly lively subject for intellectual dissection (Wimbush and Valantasis 1995; Stewart 1996, 1997). Monasticism has been seen as an ecclesiastically tamed form of charismatic asceticism, or as one area of Late Antique life where women could have some control over their destiny.

Two major breakthroughs have transformed our view of the early monastic landscape. The first has been an enormous increase in archaeological and literary data. Egyptian papyri have given us insight into the vocabulary and daily life of early monastic men and women (Goehring 1992b). The publication of neglected as well as 'heterodox' texts has provided a broader context for understanding the traditional monastic canon. Literature in ancient Christian languages such as Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Ge'ez (Ethiopic), Georgian and others is taking its place alongside the more familiar Greek and Latin texts. Excavation of monastic sites, especially in Egypt and in the Judaeian desert of Palestine, has alerted us to the complexities of monastic society and to its interactions with others (e.g., Goehring 1986; Guillaumont *et al.* 1991; Hirschfeld 1992).



Figure 14.1 A sixteenth-century illustrator's fantasy of early Egyptian monasticism, looking rather more like his native Low Countries than Late Antique Egypt. From *Solitudo, sive vitae eremicolarum* ('Solitude, or the lives of the hermits'), engraved by Jan and Raphael Sadeler after figures by Maarten de Vos, c. 1590.

The second breakthrough has been one of perspective. What we now call monasticism was part of a diverse social and religious landscape. However, until recently few historians questioned the traditional focus on those reckoned to be monastic 'founders'. These were almost without exception male, they were often bishops, and the best-known monastic literature was either by or about them. A vaguer category of 'desert fathers' acknowledged a more fluid form of monastic life, but perpetuated the assumptions that every form of Christian asceticism could be categorized and that female monasticism was simply an auxiliary enterprise. Much of the terrain lay in shadow or was simply unmapped (Goehring 1992a). Using tools of social history, literary criticism, and feminist theory, as well as the scientific discoveries noted earlier, scholars are challenging the traditional understanding of monasticism as a process of lineal descent from the founding (male) figures (e.g. Clark 1986; Elm 1994: 1–18). Efforts to recover neglected aspects of early monasticism have close ties to recent critiques of traditional categories such as 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy', and of the power structures that determined and enforced them.

However one approaches the subject, it is clear that 'monasticism' did not emerge from early Christian asceticism as the result of a single cause or a deliberate action.

For a variety of theological, social, and ecclesiastical reasons, asceticism attained a critical mass and a crucial stage of self-understanding in the fourth century. To understand the lives of monastic women and men, we must understand their particular circumstances. Local ecclesiastical factors, artistic and literary traditions, geography, language, and social conditions all contributed to expressions of Christian faith in monastic life. Monastic cultures are best approached *in situ*, as they will be here. Even where the inspiration of a particular monastic group came from elsewhere, local conditions coloured and shaped its growth. We must also remember that people and ideas travelled widely in the ancient world. These men and women visited each other, wrote letters, read one another's writings, and translated them for the benefit of others.

Amidst the variety of local forms there is a discernible monastic profile. It is recognized in the first place by adherence to a rule of life, though rarely in this period in the form of a written charter like the later *Rule of Benedict*. Direction came from oral tradition, the common experience of a particular group, a spiritual elder, or the growing body of monastic literature. The devotional and ascetic practices of the monastic life cultivated awareness of God while addressing hindrances or distractions. The normative practices were celibacy, liturgical prayer at certain hours of the day and night, memorization of biblical texts for the sake of personal prayer, fasting (both kind of food and amount), manual labour, and consultation with others experienced in the life. Although participation in the Eucharist was presumed, actual practice is not always clear. Groups and communities were normally single-sex, though there are examples of 'double monasteries' where groups of men and women lived in close proximity. Generally there was some form of distinctive dress, typically differing from common apparel more by sombre colour or poorer quality than by style. With these basic elements monasticism in each region developed its own spirituality and practices, as well as the structures and vocabulary to support them.

SYRIAN ASCETICISM

Monasticism has often been viewed as an Egyptian phenomenon of the fourth century. The real origins of monasticism, however, lay in ascetic tendencies and movements that existed from the time of the earliest Christian communities. The most fertile ground for early Christian asceticism was Syria, an inclusive geographical label covering several regions of various ascetic traditions (see Figure 14.2). The Syriac language, a Christian dialect of Aramaic, was spoken throughout Mesopotamia and the Levant. Syriac was the literary language of a flourishing Semitic Christian culture centred on the city of Edessa in Mesopotamia. Mediterranean Syria, with large Greek-speaking cities like Antioch, was more directly influenced by the Hellenistic culture of the Roman empire. Between them was Syria's limestone massif, where monasticism flourished in the fifth to seventh centuries. There the culture was mixed Syriac and Greek, and the monasticism of the region reflected the joint heritage.

Syriac Christianity in Mesopotamia was probably Jewish-Christian in origin

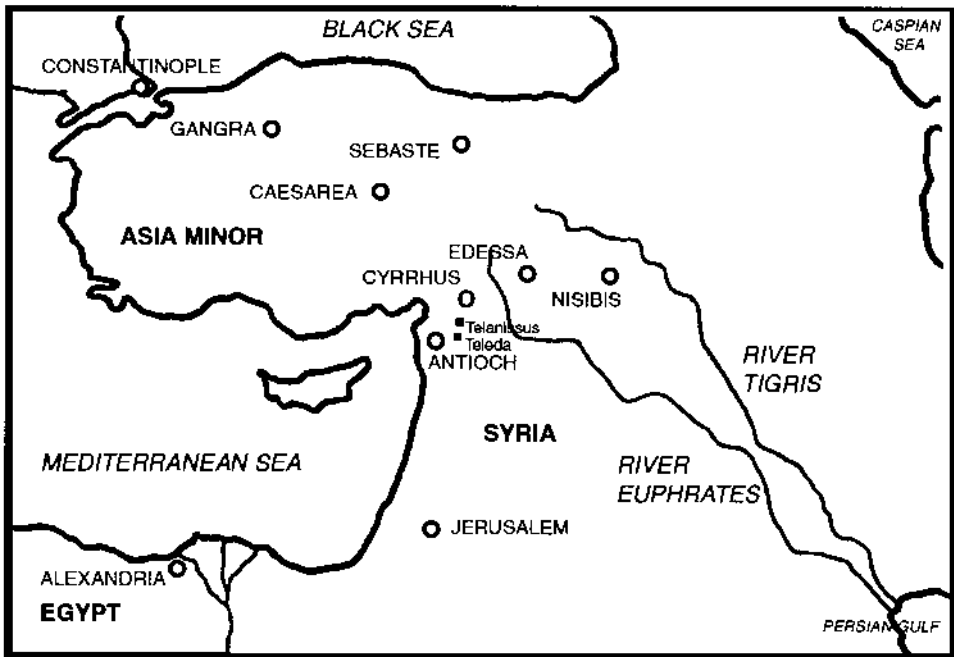


Figure 14.2 Monastic Syria, Cappadocia and Palestine.

(Murray 1975: 4–11). More Semitic and biblical than it was Greek and philosophical, this Christian culture viewed ascetic discipline and Christian commitment as inseparable. The ascetic orientation of early Syriac Christianity was so strong that celibacy may have been required for those admitted to baptism. Aphrahat (c. 270–c. 345 CE) and Ephrem of Nisibis (c. 306–73 CE), the greatest writers of the early Syriac tradition, placed a vividly eschatological emphasis on leading the ‘angelic’ life after being clothed with the glory of Christ in baptism. Joined to Christ, the only begotten, the baptized become like him: the term used for ‘ascetic’, *ibidaya*, can mean ‘only-begotten’, ‘single’, or ‘alone’. Ephrem writes of the ‘Sons and Daughters of the Covenant’ (*bnai* or *bnat qyama*) who lived as virgins or in celibate marriage (Murray 1975: 12–18; Brock 1992: 133–9; Griffith 1995).

The teaching of Aphrahat or Ephrem, however, was not separatist or elitist. They worked within church communities that accepted the equation of Christianity with asceticism. Much of Ephrem’s poetic hymnody has an explicitly sacramental context, while his prose sermons and biblical commentaries are catechetical. The ascetic pattern for Christianity that they presumed was ultimately hard to sustain as a norm for all, and asceticism became but one expression of baptismal commitment. In time, understandings of monastic life akin to those common in Egypt and Palestine overlaid the earlier, native, ascetic movements in Mesopotamia. Traditional Syriac ascetic vocabulary such as *ibidaya* was reinterpreted to suit those models of monastic life and supplemented by new terms such as *dayraya*, ‘monastery-dweller’. By the early Arab period the legend arose that Mar Augen (Eugenios), instructed by monks

in Egypt, had founded monasticism in Mesopotamia in the fourth century. Meanwhile, the sayings of the Egyptian monks and the works of writers such as Evagrius Ponticus had become enormously popular and were quickly translated into Syriac.

The earlier Syriac tradition was not entirely lost. Ephrem's hymnody continued to be a staple of the Syriac liturgy. It was both translated and imitated in Greek, becoming the basis for the later Byzantine liturgy through the Syrian Romanos the Melodist (early sixth century), the greatest Byzantine hymn-writer. Attitudes and imagery central to early Syrian asceticism deeply influenced the late fourth-century author of the Greek *Macarian Homilies*. Their author is unknown but the *Homilies* were later attributed to an Egyptian monk, Macarius the Great. The *Homilies*, luminous texts full of vivid imagery and a Spirit-centred theology, illustrate the influence of Syrian asceticism on the larger church. The *Homilies* circulated widely in various collections, and a major text from the Macarian corpus was adapted by the Cappadocian ascetic theologian Gregory of Nyssa for one of his own treatises (Staats 1984). The *Homilies* became a focus of the Messalian controversy of the late fourth and early fifth centuries, a controversy explainable at least in part as a collision of Greek and Syriac theological idioms (Stewart 1991).

In western Syria, the fifth-century evidence of the *History of the Monks of Syria* by Theodoret, bishop of Cyrrhus (393–466), and other hagiographical texts, depicts an astonishing variety of monastic forms of life. There were cenobia (communities) as well as native expressions of solitary (anchoritic) monasticism such as stylites (pillar-dwellers) and recluses, who lived in towers or similar structures. The dozens of abandoned cities on the limestone massif of north-western Syria bear abundant archaeological witness to monastic settlement of all kinds. Although the period of greatest expansion was the sixth century, monastic activity was already lively in the late fourth and early fifth centuries (Peña *et al.* 1975, 1978, 1983). We know from the *Life of Symeon* (c. 385–459) that the famous stylite began his monastic career in the company of ascetics at a local shrine before entering the famous cenobium at Teleda. Only later did he climb the pillar at Telanissus that made him famous throughout the Christian world. Theodoret, whose collection of stories about monastic men and women provides a panorama of Syrian monasticism, grew up in close contact with local monks and entered a cenobium when his parents died.

MONASTIC EGYPT

Even if Egypt was not the fountainhead of all Christian monasticism, it became its imaginative centre. Fourth- and fifth-century Egyptian monastic texts like the *Life of Anthony* and the thousands of *apophthegmata*, the sayings of the monastic elders, gave the early Christian world the themes and figures that reshaped its understanding of asceticism. Foremost among them was the idea of monasticism as a life of withdrawal into the desert. Although only a partial representation even of Egyptian monasticism, the concept of the monastic desert has been reimagined again and again to include life on rocky outcroppings off the Irish coasts, in the silent vastness of Russian forests and amidst the desolation of modern urban centres.

The key to understanding monastic Egypt and its emphasis on the desert is



Figure 14.3 The late fifth-century basilica of Saint Symeon (Qalaat Semaan) built around the stylite's pillar. The boulder in the centre of the photograph is all that remains of the pillar, once 12–18 metres tall. Photo Columba Stewart, OSB.

geography (see Figure 14.4). Human society in Egypt clung to the lifeline of the Nile. The river creates a narrow ribbon of green as it runs south to north before diffusing through the lush fields of the delta and draining into the Mediterranean. In most of Egypt the desert is no further away than an easy walk. Always in view, the desert begins at exactly the point where human ingenuity or sheer physical power can no longer bring water up from the river.

The evidence we have of much Egyptian monasticism suggests easy access to both solitude and society. We know that there were ascetic Christians in Egyptian cities and towns from at least the third century. Around 270 Anthony the Great (251–356), whom I profile in Chapter 43, renounced his inheritance and left his sister in the care of virgins who trained her in their way of life (Elm 1994; Brakke 1995). Anthony then apprenticed himself to a nearby male ascetic. The edge of the village, where Anthony lived before he sought the great desert and where Pachomius (c. 292–346) built his monasteries, placed Egyptian ascetics on the border between the realm of the living and the abode of the dead. Some ventured far into the desert seeking a more absolute solitude, but most did not: the desert lay at hand when needed, as did the village. Ascetics supported themselves by handicrafts or by working as seasonal labourers, depending on others to buy their services and to sell them food and other necessities. Two overviews of Egyptian monastic life from the early fifth century, Palladius' *Lausiac History* and the anonymous *History of the Monks in*

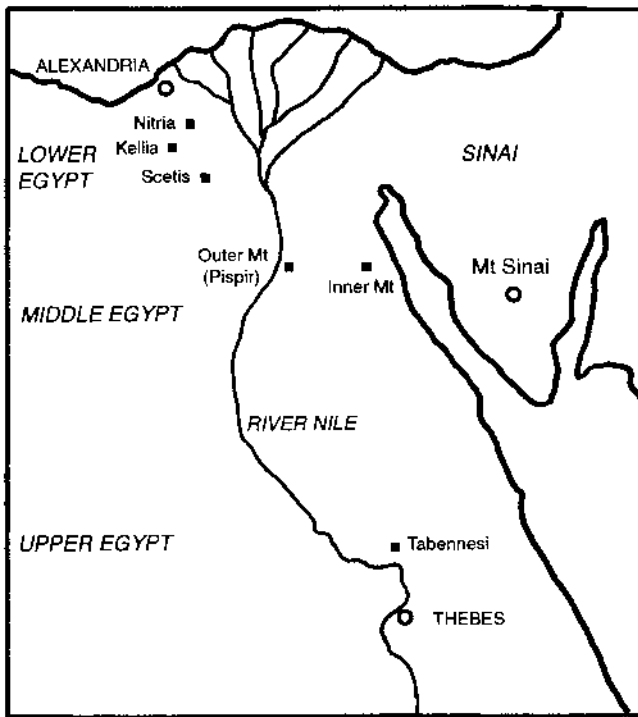


Figure 14.4 Monastic Egypt.

Egypt, illustrate both the forms ascetic life had assumed and the links between monastic Christians and their secular neighbours.

Anthony was the first Egyptian monk to attract widespread notice. His fame spread quickly throughout the Eastern and western churches, helped greatly by the biography written by Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, just after Anthony's death in 356. The *Life of Anthony* even managed to disturb the ambitious careerist Augustine in Milan, precipitating his conversion. Anthony modelled both the solitary life of the desert and an impressive engagement with others. He was a teacher to monks, an adviser to politicians, a healer of the sick and counsellor of the troubled. Despite Athanasius' portrayal of him as illiterate, he was theologically educated and wrote letters of great spiritual depth (Rubenson 1995). Anthony's teaching, with its emphasis on analysis of the forces ('demons') resistant to Christian and monastic progress, was the basis for elaboration by his successors. Discernment of the work of these demonic counter-forces was central to the ascetic life, for in recognition of truth lay the beginnings of freedom. Anthony's psychological subtlety remains impressive.

Anthony exemplified a form of monastic life that was also flourishing during his lifetime in Lower Egyptian monastic settlements at Nitria and Scetis. At both sites, monks lived a partial solitude. Groups formed around spiritual elders and met periodically for common prayer and mutual encouragement. These monastic settle-

ments and others like them generated the distinctive literature known as the *apophthegmata* ('sayings') as monastic men and women preserved in writing the teachings of their elders. The sayings were meant to awaken the hearer to new insight, though like parables their meaning is not always immediately apparent. Despite the editing and normalizing involved in the transition to written collections, the *apophthegmata* still present an array of Egyptian monastic lifestyles, solitary and communal, male and female, that are both attractive and unsettling (Gould 1993; Burton-Christie 1993).

At the rigorous outpost of Nitria known as Kellia, 'The Cells', the great Egyptian monastic theologian Evagrius Ponticus (d. 399) produced ascetical theology, biblical commentaries, and esoteric speculations. Evagrius received a superb theological education in Cappadocia and Constantinople from Gregory of Nazianzus and other teachers. In the imperial capital, he was a rising ecclesiastical star until the personal crisis created by his romantic interest in a married woman drove him from the city. Broken in spirit and in health he found his way to the monastery of Melania and Rufinus in Jerusalem and then with Melania's encouragement went on to Egypt. Like Anthony, Evagrius became famous for his psychological insight, joining his sophisticated theological training to the practical wisdom of the monastic desert.

Evagrius provides the first extant analysis of the passions under the eight headings of gluttony, lust, avarice, anger, sadness, listlessness, vainglory and pride. His theology of 'pure' or 'imageless' prayer was to be of great significance for later spirituality. The more speculative aspects of Evagrius' teaching and that of others like him particularly devoted to the thought of the brilliant third-century Alexandrian theologian, Origen, created a devastating crisis in Egyptian and Palestinian monasticism at the very end of the fourth century. Scetis and Nitria were split, and some of the most prominent monks fled to Sinai, Gaza, Palestine, and Constantinople (Guillaumont 1962; Chitty 1966: 56–9; Clark 1992). Despite the Origenist controversy, Evagrius' basic teaching on the ascetical life and on prayer was enormously important for subsequent monastic tradition and his works enjoyed wide circulation both in their original Greek and in translation. His impact was especially great in Syria, and several Syriac translations of his writings still exist. In the West his disciple John Cassian (c. 365–430) propagated the basic elements of Evagrius' teaching with a diplomatic silence about their controversial author.

The figure traditionally associated with the origins of cenobitic, or communal, monasticism is Pachomius (c. 292–346). The extant literature of Pachomian monasticism dates from a period of restoration and consolidation, and the founder's biography enshrined the guiding myths of the *Koinonia* (Goehring 1986: 236–40). Born a pagan in Upper (Southern) Egypt, Pachomius was converted to Christianity by the kindness of local Christians who fed him while he was in prison awaiting the draft. After his release, he was baptized and spent some time leading an ascetic life in a village, just as Anthony had done before moving into the desert. Pachomius then resolved to become an anchorite and apprenticed himself to an elder named Palamon; the story of his formation as a hermit is a classic vignette of that form of monastic life. After some years with Palamon, Pachomius discerned a call to develop another form of monastic life at Tabennesi with a more explicit emphasis on community.



Figure 14.5 Monastery of Deir al Suryani in the desert of Scetis. Photo Columba Stewart, OSB.

The surviving documents suggest that Pachomius' first attempts at creating a cenobium were disastrous (Veilleux 1980: 427–38). He faced resistance from his brother, who had come to be a monk with him but preferred the anchoritic model. The first members of the new community took advantage of Pachomius' patience and his preference for teaching by example rather than regulation, a pronounced emphasis in the classic anchoritic tradition. Eventually, Pachomius insisted that his followers give up all claims to individual property or preferences, and he established common policies equally applicable to all and susceptible to formulation in oral and written rules. Taking his inspiration from the early church of Jerusalem as described in Acts 2, Pachomius called his group the *Koinonia*, the 'community' or 'fellowship'. The combination of organized communal life and strong leadership by the superior, especially in a teaching role, proved attractive. Pachomius' model seems to have spread quickly as both male and female communities formed under guidance. His movement could not have been isolated from other efforts to find ascetical perfection, though the exact links between Pachomian monasticism and, e.g., gnostic groups, remain disputed (Veilleux 1986).

The sister whom Anthony left in the care of virgins later became a spiritual guide for other women. Pachomius' sister Mary was superior of one of the female communities of the *Koinonia*. Neither emerges in her own right from the scanty references in this literature directed mainly towards men. Indeed, we are never even told the name of Anthony's sister. We know there were groups of ascetic women in the cities. Palladius included stories about a number of women in his ascetical

compendium, the *Lausiac History*, and a handful of women are among the revered elders of the surviving *apophthegmata* (Elm 1994: 253–82, 311–30). Among them is Amma Syncletica, whose sayings are extracted from a compelling but mysterious text composed sometime in the early fifth century. The anonymous *Life and Regimen of Blessed Syncletica* bears several literary parallels with the *Life of Anthony*, and contains clear allusions to Evagrian spiritual theology. Syncletica is presented as the beautiful daughter of a prominent Alexandrian family who resolved to live as an ascetic in a family tomb outside of the city. She collected disciples and formed the community to whom she delivers the instructions found in her *Life*. Her teaching on poverty and chastity shows a distinctive approach to these conventional themes and allows a rare glimpse into how women interpreted and applied fundamental ascetic motifs (Forman 1993; Bongie 1997).

INTERNATIONAL MONASTICISM IN PALESTINE

When imperial patronage of Christianity began under Constantine in the early fourth century, Palestine became a centre of pilgrimage and ecclesiastical development (see Figure 14.6). The identification of holy places led to massive building projects and an influx of visitors, clergy, and monastic men and women. Many came as pilgrims and stayed as monks and nuns.

Monasticism in Byzantine Palestine had several interrelated elements. On the coast in Gaza both hermits and monastic communities could be found beginning in the fourth century, although their greatest fame would come two centuries later (Neyt and Angelis-Noah 1997: 13–22). There were monastic communities associated with urban holy places, most notably in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Closely linked to these as sites of pilgrimage were the monasteries of the Jordan Plain near Jericho. Most gripping to the imagination was the monasticism of the hilly Judean desert east of Jerusalem. The dramatic difference in rainfall between the Holy City atop the rocky spine of central Palestine and the Judean hills and valleys plunging towards the Dead Sea created a unique ambience for monastic life. Though the desert was visible from the Mount of Olives, the peculiar geography of Palestine – not unlike Egypt in effect, though not in form – made the monasticism of the desert environmentally and psychologically quite distinct from that of the towns or the river plain (Hirschfeld 1992: 6–10).

We know that there were Greek communities in both Jerusalem and Bethlehem in the late fourth century. Writing in the early 380s the indefatigable Spanish pilgrim Egeria, herself a nun, mentions both male and female monastic residents in both places. It would seem from Egeria's account that she found monks at virtually every pilgrimage site she visited from Sinai to the Galilee. The young John Cassian came to Bethlehem in the early 380s and became a monk in a Greek-speaking cenobium there. There were also non-Greek monasteries in Jerusalem as Armenians, Copts, Georgians and others established churches and hostels for their own pilgrims. Monasteries grew up around these establishments to care for the pilgrims who frequented them.

Among the famous Latin Christians who made their way to the Holy Land in the

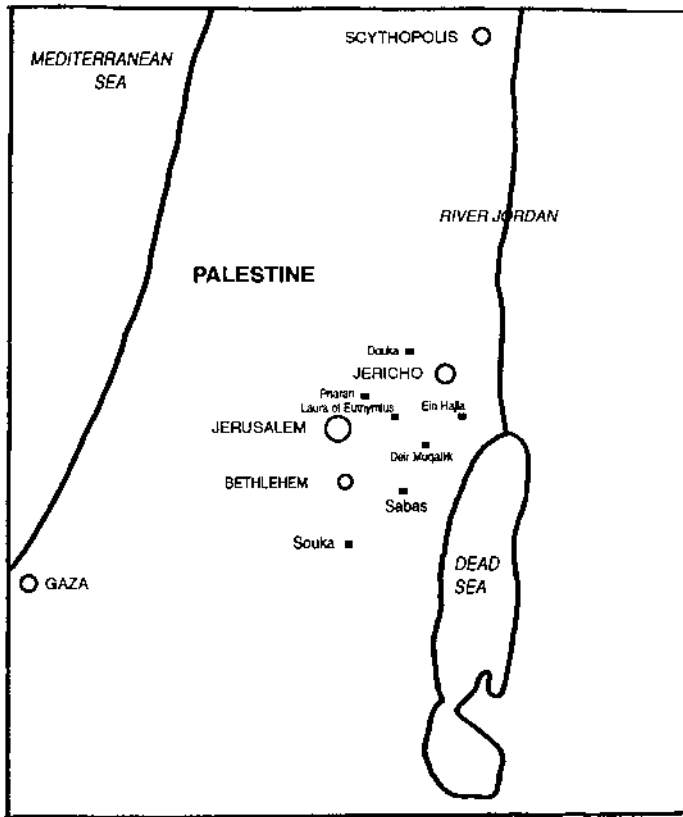


Figure 14.6 Monastic Palestine.

380s were Melania and Rufinus, who established a community remarkable for its learning on the Mount of Olives across from Jerusalem. Both were scholars and noted Origenists, and it was to them that the distraught Evagrius came after fleeing Constantinople. In Bethlehem Jerome and Paula lived next to the Cave of the Nativity, and Jerome undertook his massive project of translating the Bible from its original Hebrew and Greek into Latin. In each case the women financed the enterprise and underwrote the literary projects of their male colleagues.

The monasticism of the Jordan plain developed in an area attractive to pilgrims eager to visit the famous biblical town of Jericho and to bathe in the waters of the river where Jesus himself was baptized. Indeed, the first mention of monks in Palestine is of hermits at Ein Hajla, a spring near the Jordan just north of the Dead Sea. The site was known as Calamon, 'reed-bed', from the vegetation around the spring. This and nearby sites were extensively developed in the fifth and sixth centuries during the principal growth period for Judaeian monasticism. A recent archaeological survey counted more than 25 sites in the small area (25 square kilometres) between Jericho and the river (Hirschfeld 1992).

The Judaeian desert south of Jericho is a compact region of stark hills cut by deep

canyons. The landscape created more monastic living space than a flat area of comparable size could provide. The canyons provided both natural caves for monastic dwellings and a measure of privacy. Consequently, large numbers of monastic settlements were possible in a narrow strip of land ranging about 60 kilometres from north to south and 20 kilometres from west to east. Recent archaeological surveys have identified at least 45 sites in the hills, some of considerable size (Hirschfeld 1992). Survival was possible by locating monasteries near springs and/or collecting winter rainfall into cisterns through catchment techniques. The landscape helps to explain one of the ascetic practices characteristic of this tradition, that of Lenten wandering in the desert. Because Lent came at the end of the rainy season, a time of natural provision of both water and of edible plants, one could live off the land in a manner impossible during the rest of the year.

As far as we know the monasticism of the Judaeen desert was exclusively male. The major figures associated with its three principal phases all came from Asia Minor on pilgrimage to the holy places and never left. The first of them, Chariton, survived persecution in Lycaonia (southern Asia Minor) and came to Jerusalem in the early fourth century. He staked out a series of monastic settlements from the north to the south of the Judaeen desert, beginning around 330 at Pharan ('Ein Fara), east of Jericho. A few years later he moved to Douka, above Jericho on the traditional Mount of Temptation, and finally ended up at Souka (Khirbet Khareitun), near Bethlehem (see Figure 14.7). It was Chariton who developed the distinctive form of Judaeen desert monasticism, a semi-eremitic way of life known as the *laura*. A *laura* consisted of a central complex (church, refectory, etc.) and individual monastic cells arrayed at some distance from the centre. The cells were often dotted along a canyon ridge, perhaps explaining the name: one meaning of the Greek word *laura* is 'lane'. The monks spent the weekdays alone in their cells and assembled at the main complex for Sunday liturgy and a common meal.

The history of the next two phases of Judaeen desert monasticism is known to us from the extraordinary series of monastic biographies written by Cyril (c. 525–58?), a native of Scythopolis (Beth-Shean) who came to Jerusalem as a monk in the 540s (Flusin 1983; Binns 1994). Cyril lived in monasteries associated with Euthymius (377–473) and Sabas (439–532), whose lives he would write. Both Jerusalem and the desert were highly politicized throughout this period and beyond, and Cyril's accounts of Euthymius and Sabas are dominated by ecclesiastical and doctrinal controversies.

Euthymius was a priest from Armenia who came to Palestine already a monk. He entered the *laura* at Pharan which had been founded some 70 years earlier by Chariton and there he met his future colleague Theoctistus, with whom he established the first cenobium in the Judaeen desert (Deir Muqallik) around 411. Euthymius established the principle that monks should ordinarily begin their monastic life in a cenobium and then proceed to the *laura*. The *laura* he himself founded (Khan al-Ahmar) was converted into a cenobium shortly after his death, a decision credited to Euthymius himself via an apparition. Euthymius was spiritual guide to the Empress Eudokia (d. 460), the great builder of fifth-century Jerusalem, and converted her to the Chalcedonian view of Christology. He also began Christian pastoral outreach to the nomadic Arab tribes of the desert.



Figure 14.7 Wadi Chariton in Palestine: looking north from the site of Souka, the Laura of Chariton. The Herodion is in the centre. Photo Columba Stewart, OSB.

Expansion and development continued throughout the fifth and sixth centuries, particularly under Sabas' leadership, though the monasteries were terribly divided by the rekindled Origenist controversy of the sixth century. The Persian invasion of 614, followed in less than twenty five years by the conquest of Palestine by the Arab armies, shrank the monastic population and began the process of abandonment of the monastic sites in the desert.

CAPPADOCIAN DOMESTIC AND COMMUNAL ASCETICISM

Paul the apostle, himself a native of Tarsus on the southern coast of Asia Minor, visited Cappadocia in central Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) on his third missionary journey. The church in Cappadocia was strongly influenced by Syrian Christianity through Armenia, which lay just to the east. Apocryphal gospels and acts, with their emphasis on asceticism and especially on virginity and celibacy, circulated widely. Ascetic communities were forming in the first half of the fourth century under the guidance of Eustathius, bishop of Sebaste in Armenia. The so-called *Macarian Homilies* circulated in Cappadocia shortly after their composition in the 370s. Cappadocia was home to three of the greatest theologians of the early Christian world. Two were brothers, Basil, bishop of Caesarea (c. 330–79) and Gregory, bishop of Nyssa (c. 330–c. 395), and the third, another Gregory known by his hometown of Nazianzus (329–89), was a close friend. All had received a fine education, were sympathetic to the Alexandrian theological tradition exemplified by Origen, and became major figures in the development of post-Nicene Trinitarian orthodoxy. All three were also inclined towards asceticism, which was a strong theme in Origen's writings and of course increasingly prominent in the fourth century. Basil became involved in the guidance of monastic communities, and Gregory of Nyssa was a mystical and ascetical writer of great depth. Cappadocia was thus a confluence of Eastern ascetic currents and Hellenistic theology.

In the family of Basil and Gregory of Nyssa, the women were the ascetic leaders (Elm 1994: 78–105; Rousseau 1994: 61–76). Their sister, known as Macrina the Younger, persuaded their mother Emmelia to establish communal ascetic life on a family estate near Caesarea in the late 350s. Macrina had been converted to asceticism sometime earlier when the family still lived in Caesarea, perhaps through acquaintance with texts such as the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. Her brother, Naucratus, lived on the estate as a semi-hermit. It was to this home environment that Basil returned after completion of his studies and a brief career in teaching. Newly baptized, Basil resolved to live as an ascetic across the river from the family villa, and there he wrote his first ascetic treatise, the *Moral Rules*.

Basil was not destined for retirement and soon went back to Caesarea to work for the bishop whom he later succeeded. Meanwhile the family ascetic community grew under Macrina's leadership, attracting new members and developing along more structured lines. By the time of her death in 380 the domestic asceticism led by family and servants in the 350s had become a monastery for both women and men.

The description left to us in Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Macrina*, written immediately after her death, shows us Cappadocian monasticism led by women.

The family were not the only influence on Basil's asceticism. After his baptism he visited Syria, Mesopotamia, Palestine and Egypt. Most significant, however, was his encounter in Eastern Asia Minor with Eustathius (c. 300–c. 370). Eustathius was a controversial figure trying to negotiate the tension between the sectarian tendencies of asceticism and the imperative of ecclesial integration. A native of Sebaste in Armenia, where his father was bishop, he studied in Alexandria under the great presbyter and teacher Arius. Consequently he had hesitations about the Council of Nicaea, a fact which would later cause problems with Basil. The ascetic communities organized by Eustathius may have been influenced by the developments in Egypt, but were surely also based on local traditions shaped by Syrian asceticism (Gribomont 1984: 15–18, 26–41).

Many bishops were troubled by the behaviour of ascetic groups, as we learn from the canons of a council held at Gangra sometime in the 340s or 350s that sought to define correct asceticism. Asceticism was not new, but as it became more prominent and institutionalized, it began to seem a social and financial threat to other ecclesiastical institutions. Eustathius set about toning down ascetic non-conformity, and after his own election as bishop of Sebaste in 357 he worked to reconcile ascetic communities with the institutional church by having them provide charitable services such as a large hospice in Sebaste. This is just what Basil would later do as bishop in Caesarea.

Basil's interest in ecclesiastical order and organization made him sensitive to issues of accountability and nomenclature. His *Asceticon* (the name was given to various editions of a commentary on basic points of ascetic spirituality and governance) established a teaching role for the bishop and outlined a clear sense of how ascetic communities fit into the life of the larger church (Rousseau 1994: 190–228). Basil took pains to minimize distinctions between the Christian and monastic vocations. He avoided specifically monastic terminology, preferring euphemisms like 'the devout life'. The spirituality is explicitly biblical, based on living out the two commandments of love of God and neighbour. The tone and discipline are moderate. As one reads through the first few sections of the *Long Rules*, the principal component of the *Asceticon*, Basil's effort to maintain a distinctive identity for the communities while avoiding separatist, sectarian rhetoric is notable even if not always successful. In different editions and sections of the *Asceticon* the reader sees the evolution of structures and policies; over time, the communities inevitably became increasingly 'monastic' in identity.

The work of Macrina and Basil illustrates how asceticism moved to centre stage in one region of the Christian world. Assessments of this development vary. Some see it as a regrettable co-opting of asceticism by church leaders, while others note the significance of establishing a clear place for monasticism in the larger church. Basil's work has been of great importance for the development of Byzantine monasticism, and Rufinus of Aquileia translated an early edition of the *Asceticon* into Latin. A copy of that translation found its way into the hands of Benedict of Nursia, who mentions Basil by name in the closing lines of his *Rule*.

ITALIAN ASCETICISM AND MONASTICISM

In fourth-century Italy asceticism was most apparent among propertied widows and the young women they and ascetically minded bishops encouraged to choose a life of consecrated virginity (Jenal 1995). An early adherent to ascetic ideals in the 350s was Marcella, who was inspired by a Latin translation of the *Life of Anthony* and by her conversations in the 370s with the exiled Nicene bishop of Alexandria, Peter. Paula and Melania were Roman matrons who eventually founded monasteries in Palestine, where their advanced notions of asceticism had a warmer reception than in the more conventional circles of Rome. These were educated women who enjoyed the intellectual and spiritual companionship of like-minded men, to the fascination and distress of their peers.

Asceticism could be a disruptive social force anywhere it became popular, but the controversy was particularly fierce in Italy. Early in his episcopate in Milan, Ambrose (c. 339–97; bishop 374–97) urged the young girls of the city to follow inclinations to consecrated virginity even over their parents' objections. His own sister, Marcellina, had taken a formal vow of virginity in Rome some 20 years before, receiving the virgin's veil from the pope at the Christmas liturgy. Ambrose hoped to introduce such Roman ideas (and the public veiling ceremonies that accompanied

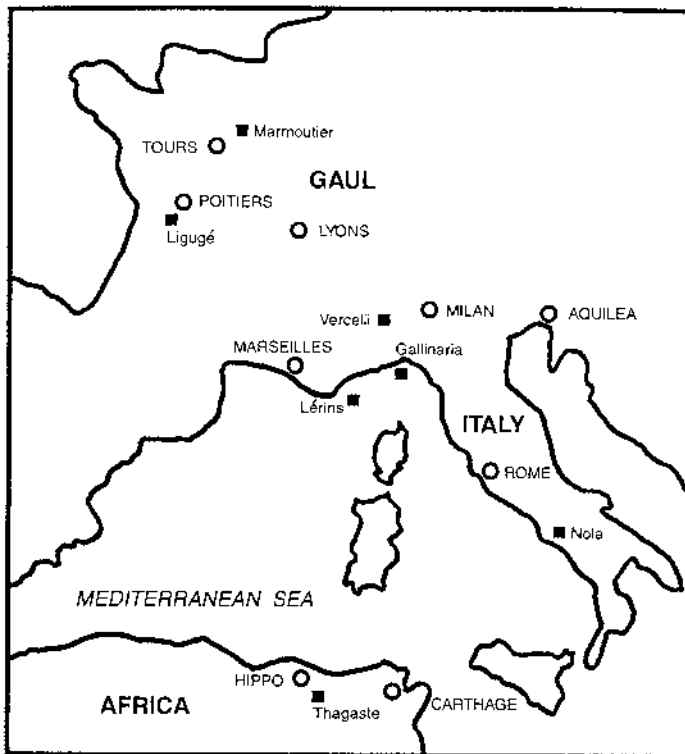


Figure 14.8 Latin Monasticism.

them) to Milan, where asceticism previously had a low profile (Brown 1988: 341–65; McLynn 1994: 60–8).

Shortly after Ambrose's campaign began in Milan, Jerome spent a few years in Rome arguing the case for asceticism, and especially virginity. His opponents were people such as Helvidius, an advocate for traditional family life. Jerome's famous *Letter 22 to Eustochium* (c. 384) was a strident and even inflammatory exhortation to Paula's daughter encouraging her to stand firm in her resolve to live as virgin and ascetic. Although Jerome managed to trounce Helvidius in argument, his typically caustic and occasionally vicious manner was offensive to many and eroded his popularity. The death of Jerome's patron, Pope Damasus, in late 384, and a rumour campaign about his relationship with Paula, led them to leave Italy the following year for Bethlehem.

Both Ambrose and Jerome related their arguments in favour of virginity to a theological anthropology linking sexuality to the fallen state of humankind. They saw sexual renunciation, and especially virginity, as a way to reclaim the intended human condition. Both of them were strong advocates of the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, mother of Jesus. They extended their argument to include a celibate clergy. The consecrated virgins of Milan and Rome were the forerunners; the ordained men were to follow their example.

The evidence for male asceticism in Italy is less abundant than for the women. Ambrose, however, in a letter to the church of Vercelli (*Epistle* 63), a town not far from Milan, praised the example of their former bishop Eusebius (bishop 334–71), who had lived 'like a monk'. Eusebius had spent time in Egypt during a period of exile from 355–63 and doubtless encountered monasticism there. At Vercelli he established a monastery for himself and his clergy. Augustine writes in the *Confessions* of the monastery of men at Milan under Ambrose's care and of encounters a friend had with ascetics who were reading the *Life of Anthony*.

The significant figure for Italian monasticism of the early fifth century is Paulinus (355–431), later bishop of Nola. Born in Bordeaux, son of a Roman senator, himself a provincial governor, Paulinus knew Ambrose and met Martin of Tours when he returned to Gaul. He married a wealthy Spanish woman, Theresia, but after the death of their only child in 389 they left Gaul and went to Spain where they soon began to sell off their property and to pursue their shared interest in the ascetic life. After Paulinus was ordained a priest they returned to Italy, settling south of Rome in Nola where they established a monastery for men and women. Probably after the death of Theresia, around 410, he was ordained bishop of Nola. Paulinus' descriptions of their monastic life and archaeological excavation in Nola suggest a monastery in which men lived on one side of the hallway and women on the other, with paintings of holy men and women of the Bible marking the respective sides. There was a church, a guesthouse with three sets of rooms for the wealthy, the poor, and the sick. The members of the community wore distinctive dress, with trimmed hair for the men and veils for the women (Lienhard 1977).

The tradition of wealthy Roman female ascetics continued with the richest of them all, Melania the Younger (385–439; Clark 1984). Named for her famous grandmother, she had ascetic leanings but was compelled to marry. After the death of her two children, she persuaded her husband Pinian to live celibately. Leaving

Rome, they began to dispose of their massive wealth, a process lovingly chronicled in her *Life*. After spending some time on their estates in Sicily they visited Augustine in North Africa and saw monks in Egypt. Along the way they made a point of meeting famous ascetics and tried to unload their gold wherever they could; one monk threw it in the Nile. They settled in Jerusalem, where Melania built a cell and eventually a monastery on the Mount of Olives where she remained the dominant figure (though not the official superior) until her death.

GAUL: NATIVE AND IMPORTED MONASTIC CULTURES

Christianity came to Gaul, a region including modern France, the Low Countries and parts of Germany, at least by the early second century. At that time there was a persecuted Greek-speaking community of Christian settlers in Lyons that was soon to be led by one of the greatest early theologians, Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–200). The story of monasticism in Gaul, however, pertains to the Latin church which developed in the region throughout the third and fourth centuries.

There were two major centres from which monasticism spread, though of course there were ascetic individuals and groups in many areas. We can identify a first wave of monastic influence moving east from Tours in the Aquitaine, inspired by Martin (c. 316–97) and his successors. A second movement spread north from the island monastery of Lérins off the southern coast of Gaul, producing numerous church leaders and a number of monastic rules. At the close of our period, a widely travelled and wise monk named John Cassian (c. 365–c. 430), to whom I will return, wrote up his monastic experiences in a compendium of traditional teaching and creative analysis that would be of tremendous importance for later western monasticism.

Martin's asceticism was decidedly western. His own teaching, as conveyed by his biographer, Sulpitius Severus (c. 360–c. 430), contains no reference to Egyptian or other Eastern Christian models. According to Sulpitius, it was only after Martin's death that members of his circle visited the monasteries of the Orient. Martin was born in Pannonia (modern Austria) into a military family and was raised in Italy not far from Milan. Destined from birth to a career in the army, he became a soldier at age 15. He was baptized a few years later, after his famous encounter with a beggar who later appeared to him in a vision as Christ clothed in the cloak Martin had sliced in two and shared. Sulpitius indicates a brief interval between baptism and leaving the army to pursue the ascetic life; history suggests a much longer period, as much as thirty years.

Martin had probably encountered monasticism in northern Italy like that of his older contemporary Eusebius of Vercelli. It is also possible that in the course of his army service Martin visited monasteries in the East as Eusebius did during a period of exile from 355–63. After leaving the army he lived in Poitiers with its bishop Hilary until the latter was expelled from his see because of his Nicene views. Martin then went to Milan and lived as a hermit. Expelled by an Arian bishop, Martin lived as a hermit on the island of Gallinaria, off the north-western Italian coast near Genoa. When it became possible to return to Gaul, Martin settled near Poitiers in a place named Ligugé. Again he lived as a hermit, but disciples came and settled

around him and he established the kind of monasticism for which he became known: relatively unstructured, semi-eremitic and centred upon a teacher. After being named bishop of Tours in 371, Martin established a similar retreat at Marmoutier. The community that formed there was more structured than at Ligugé, though the basic emphasis on contemplation and obedience to the master was the same. Marmoutier became Martin's base for vigorous missionary work of fighting demons, converting pagans, building churches and monasteries on the sites of pagan shrines, and raising the dead (a point on which Sulpitius compares Martin to Egyptian anchorites and cenobites, to the disadvantage of the latter).

The second major monastic movement in Gaul was in Provence, radiating north from the small, rocky island of Lérins, which is located east of Marseilles. There Honoratus (d. 430), a Gaul who had visited Palestine and Egypt after his conversion to asceticism, organized the existing anchorites into a cenobium and provided them with a written monastic rule around the year 400 (Pricoco 1978; Vogüé 1982). In doing so, Honoratus established a monastic centre that would have great influence along the Mediterranean coast to the west and north along the Rhône valley. Lérins has been called the cradle of the episcopate for southern Gaul, since many of its monks became bishops, fostering monastic foundations in their dioceses.

Honoratus and Sulpitius were contemporaries, but the monasticism of Lérins owed much more to Egyptian models than did Martin's. Both Honoratus' travels and the position of Lérins near trade routes explain the look to the East. The first Lérinian rule (known as the *Rule of the Four Fathers* from its format as a conversation among four monks) shows Egyptian influence in its strong emphasis on obedience to the superior and a daily fast until the ninth hour (i.e., 3 p.m.). The horarium allowed for three hours of personal prayer at the beginning of the day followed by work until the meal. The series of Lérinian texts shows the development of the Latin literary genre of the monastic rule (*regula*), though there is no sense that a rule was an unalterable text: such a notion would arise only in the ninth-century canonization of the *Rule of Benedict*.

In the early fifth century, during Honoratus' tenure at Lérins, a monk named John Cassian arrived in Marseilles. A native of the bilingual (Latin and Greek) region of Scythia Minor, Cassian became a monk in Bethlehem in the Greek cenobium known to have existed before Jerome established his community. Inspired by tales of monastic Egypt, Cassian and his friend Germanus left their monastery in order to visit communities and individuals in Lower Egypt. They settled at Scetis for several years, leaving Egypt most likely because of the Origenist controversy of 399. After a few years in Constantinople under the patronage of the monk and bishop John Chrysostom, Cassian probably lived in Rome before moving on to Marseilles (then known as Massilia) in the 410s. During the last two decades of his life, he wrote his influential *Institutes* and *Conferences* (Stewart 1998).

Cassian's own life is the key to appreciating his contribution to monastic literature. Firmly persuaded of the value of Egyptian monastic spirituality and customs for the emerging monasticism of the West, he summarized his experiences in monasteries of the East and provided a creative synthesis and practical application of particularly Evagrian monastic thought. Cassian claimed to bring the elders of the Egyptian desert to his Latin readership. He admitted to adjusting the Egyptian

traditions according to his own idea of what monks in Gaul needed to know, hoping to influence their monastic development along lines quite different from those of Martin and his followers. In that he succeeded, perhaps beyond his dreams, for Benedict of Nursia enshrined Cassian's writings among the texts named in his *Rule*.

AUGUSTINE

The Christianity of Roman Africa was famous for its rigorism. Torn since the second century by disputes about ideological and moral purity, the Christian community had strong advocates of asceticism. Tertullian (c. 160–c. 225), the first prominent Latin Christian theologian (see Chapter 40 by David Wright), wrote a treatise on virginity and was involved in some manner with the Montanists, a group which combined sexual and dietary asceticism with an emphasis on prophecy (see Chapter 36 by Christine Trevett). Tertullian's adherence to a rigorist view of Christian life was typical of the African church, which suffered fierce persecution and had to decide where to draw the boundaries of the community.

The links between asceticism and other ideological forces are not always clear even though the favourable attitude of the African church towards celibacy, fasting, and poverty is manifest. Cyprian (d. 258), the famous bishop of Carthage, followed Tertullian's lead in writing about virginity. Their dim view of human sexuality was part of the theological legacy later inherited by the young Augustine, an African by birth and education who went to Italy. There he fell under the spell of Ambrose in Milan (see Chapter 47 by Ivor Davidson) and first encountered monasticism. The story of Augustine is well known and told elsewhere in this volume (see Chapter 48 by Carol Harrison). It is Augustine the monk and founder of monasteries who concerns us here.

Augustine himself tells us in Book 8 of the *Confessions* of the impact of hearing from his friend Pontitianus about Anthony the Great and those in Milan who had imitated his example. To Augustine, a sensitive and perhaps overly complex social climber and careerist, Anthony's direct response to God's call was a marvel. The fact that young men like himself had imitated Anthony came as an indictment. Augustine presents this incident as the immediate cause of his final crisis of decision, in which the issue of sexuality figured prominently. For Augustine, baptism meant asceticism. He could postulate the notion that marriage is an honourable Christian choice, but for him baptism meant a total break with everything that had gone before, which for him had included a common-law wife. Augustine's ambivalence towards human sexuality has been the subject of much recent study (e.g., Brown 1988: 387–427). It is important to remember that his theology had antecedents in both Africa and Milan.

Augustine returned to Africa after baptism, styling himself a *servus Dei* (servant of God) and intent on establishing a monastic community. He was a deeply social being who needed companionship. It is no surprise that the *Praeceptum* ('Instruction'), the basic charter for his monastery at Hippo, emphasizes fraternal charity above all else and shows a remarkable sensitivity to the issues which might impede it, such as differences in social class, access to common goods, and quarrels. Written

about 397, just as Augustine became bishop of Hippo, this text circulated widely and has been used as (or as part of) a monastic rule to the present day (Lawless 1987). It was a major influence on the developing Lérinian tradition in Gaul and also on Benedict of Nursia, who borrowed from Augustine some of the tenderest lines found in his *Rule*. Augustine, or his immediate circle, also produced a brief set of instructions on monastic liturgical prayer, the *Ordo monasterii*, and an exhortation to sisterly charity sent to a monastery of women at Hippo (*Obiurgatio*). Used in combination with a feminine version of the *Praeceptum*, these made for a female monastic rule (preserved as Augustine's *Letter 211*). Augustine also addressed a major treatise on the necessity of monastic work to monks of Carthage around the year 400 (*De opere monachorum*).

In Augustine we see the monk-bishop met previously in Basil the Great. Both were concerned with the internal life of monastic communities and with ecclesiastical good order. Eager to integrate monasticism into the larger church, they were equally aware of the need to call monastic communities to social responsibility. They were harbingers of the Byzantine and Latin medieval ecclesiastical landscapes in which bishops and monastic communities were sometimes rivals, often friends, and always intertwined. The eventual extension of mandatory celibacy to all major clerical orders in the Latin church, and the Byzantine requirement that all bishops be in monastic vows, is but one sign of the influence of monasticism on the life of the church. Monastic women, despite their canonical subjection to male authority, found a freedom and self-direction that was unobtainable in other ways of life. In assessing the legacy of early Christian monasticism, it can simply be noted that for the vast majority of Christians during the last 1,500 years a church without monasticism would have been unimaginable.

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PART IV

EVERYDAY CHRISTIAN
EXPERIENCE



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SOCIAL LEVELS, MORALS AND DAILY LIFE



Bruce J. Malina

SOCIAL RANKING

Overview

Social ranking is the ordered arrangement of social units (persons and/or groups) along a scale or scales calibrated in terms of some commonly accepted basis of valuation. Accepted scales of valuation differ from society to society, even among subgroups in the same society. It is important to note that cross-culturally, such scales usually have nothing in common (see Williams 1970: 102–14; Duling 1995, 1997).

During the period of the Roman empire, what was the social standing of those who believed Jesus to be Israel's forthcoming Messiah or of those who believed Jesus to be the new revelation of God? These believers formed what I shall call 'Jesus groups' (outsiders called them *Christianoī* in Greek and *Christiani* in Latin, meaning partisans of *Christos*). To answer the question of the social standing of Jesus group members, we must decide whether to evaluate them by our own criteria and concerns as many authors have done, or to evaluate them in terms of criteria in vogue in Mediterranean antiquity (see Rohrbaugh 1984). Furthermore, we might usefully distinguish between rankings that crosscut communities and cover the more inclusive society from the rankings that prevail within specific localities and lesser social organizations, such as associations, clubs, collegia or even kinship groups. In other words, the population of the first five centuries of the Roman empire can be considered in terms of a number of ranking orders: (1) the ranking structure of a specific local community (e.g. people in the non-elite Judaeon quarter of Alexandria or Corinth; of greatest interest to individuals and groups in those communities); (2) a number of separate ranking structures in small communities in a specific localities inhabited by similar peoples (e.g. Judaeon communities in Hellenistic cities; of greater interest to individuals and groups in the locality); (3) ranking structures covering the total regional society (e.g. the *decuriones* of Decapolis cities; usually of interest to persons and groups in regional central places); (4) an empire-wide ranking system (e.g. Roman elites; probably of little interest to most of the people in the empire). The ranking of persons into broad strata for the whole society is much less

precise and specific than the ranking that occurs in a small community, or segment of a community. Given the face-to-face quality of Mediterranean societies, it would seem that most individuals probably were not nearly as much concerned with the former as with the latter. In the local area, characteristics of individuals and families were often widely known in great detail (e.g. bishops and deacons chosen for family traits). On the other hand, in the larger society of the Roman empire and its elites, judgements are more broadly categorical and tend to focus on power, patronage, wealth, publicized achievement, and outstanding family reputation. In actual behaviour, a person's social ranking varies from group to group and situation to situation; and even the prestige of occupations is differently rated in different parts of the society.

To speak of a scale of stratification for Jesus group members throughout the whole Roman empire, therefore, is to make a generalization that may not exactly fit any particular situation. On the other hand, given available information, it seems best to begin with the much less precise and specific ranking of the Roman elite perception of the whole Roman *oikoumene*. Even if somewhat broad and vague, the ranking perceptions of elites are very useful since as a rule non-elite populations tend to consider elite norms as ideals by which to assess themselves and replicate their behaviour. However, to avoid anachronism and ethnocentrism it seems useful to present some broad considerations about social ranking in general and in comparative perspective, then to examine the general social system prevailing in the Roman empire, and finally to consider the social organization of Jesus groups.

Some general considerations

Any attempt to understand the ranking system used by persons in societies other than our own requires a comparative perspective. Comparison further requires that we dispense with the rich differences of concrete behaviour and focus on some comparable generalities.

From the viewpoint of our own experience, all societies might be viewed as consisting of (at least) four major social institutions: kinship, politics, economics and religion. Social institutions are fixed forms of phases of social life. They do not exist independently of each other, except in terms of abstract analysis. Institutions are the ways or means that people use to realize meaningful, human social living within a distinct social system. Kinship is about 'naturing' and nurturing people; politics is about effective collective action; economics is about provisioning society; and religion deals with the significance and meaning of human beings within a given environment, including the all-embracing ultimate cosmic meaning of it all.

Extrinsic (institutional) criteria of ranking

Since human beings are social beings, they must necessarily interact with other humans in order to realize their basic human capabilities. To have effect on others, people in complex societies generally ply each other with symbols. We might lawfully threaten another with physical harm to get effect, either because we hold public office and can sanction our decisions, or we wear a badge and have a gun.

Having effect by threat of force is called *power*. Similarly, we might give a person some specially printed paper and get a meal, a car or a house in return. The paper, of course, is money, and the way we have effect is called *inducement*. Further, people mutually have effect on each other because they know and feel themselves bonded to each other by ties of solidarity and loyalty; that is, kinship and kin-like ties. Children comply with requests of parents, just as good friends comply with requests made by their friends because of existing ties of solidarity, commitment, and loyalty. A request activates internalized commitment, and non-compliance would produce feelings of shame. Having effect on another because of some implied threat of shame is called *commitment activation*. Finally, we might submit to a surgical procedure and have a lung removed because some certified person gives us good reasons for doing so at this time. The person in question whose good reasons we accept might be called a 'physician', and the physician has effect because of the reasons given – an interaction called *influence*. In sum, we have effect on others, and they on us, because we ply each other with power, inducement, commitment activation, and influence. These are the symbolic media that people use in social interaction to produce effects on others (after Talcott Parsons; see Malina 1986a: 68–97).

The relationship of these symbolic media and the social institutions noted previously is as follows. Power is the coin of politics; inducement, of economics; commitment activation, of kinship; and influence, of religion (meaning systems). Power is expressed vertically; perception of the vertical dimension in terms of above and below, super- and sub-, is the natural symbol of power. Similarly, inducement is expressed in terms of size or mass; it is a quantity dimension, often replicated in quantity-oriented perceptions of persons and objects in society. Then, commitment activation is represented by the horizontal dimension in terms of insider/outsider, or ingroup/outgroup; commitment with its solidarity and loyalty belongs to those within. Finally, influence looks to the quality of persons of proven credibility, expressed in quality dimensions of good–better–best. There are, then, vertical rankings of power with eminence ratings; and horizontal rankings of commitment activation with prominence ratings. There are also size or mass (quantity) rankings with affluence ratings; and quality rankings with competence ratings.

The position of individuals within a ranking sequence is called *status*, while the behaviour expected of people of certain statuses is called *role*. Persons in a given society have a number of statuses, hence various roles. Roles are indicative of institutional location, hence of the status of a person within that institution (Zelditch 1968). For example, in a complex society, a person who is mother in the kinship institution is citizen/voter in the political institution; she is consumer in the economic institution, and believer in the religious institution.

The previous discussion is summarized in Figure 15.1. Thus there are four *extrinsic* criteria of ranking: power, inducement, commitment activation, and influence. The ability to wield any of these four are not individual or personal abilities; rather, they inhere in the traditional institutional statuses which a person occupies in the social system. The roles one plays point to statuses within the overall system. In this sense social roles point to stereotypical, presumed entitlements and responsibilities (equally entailing a correlative scale of prestige and deference). People in their social statuses have effect on each other in terms of these four, and thus hold

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Kinship</i>	<i>Politics</i>	<i>Economics</i>	<i>Religion</i>
Function	Naturing and nurturing humans	Effective collective action	Provisioning group members	Proximate and ultimate meaning
Ranking criteria	Commitment (Solidary loyalty)	Power	Inducement	Influence
Natural symbol	Horizontal	Vertical	Mass/size, quantity	Depth, quality
Ranking valuation	First/last	Highest/lowest	Most/least (fewest)	Best/worst
Negative valuation	Shameless, without shame, honour	Powerless, weak	Poor, penurious	Ignorant, foolish
Prestige scale	Prominence	Eminence	Affluence	Competence
Outcome value	Belonging	Control of persons	Control of things	Meaning
Status	Age, gender, origin	Legal rank	Land ownership occupation	Profession
Role	Father, mother, (patron, client), son, daughter, uncle, aunt, cousin, etc.	Emperor, senator, equestrian, <i>decurio</i> , citizen, subject, slave	Agriculturalist, large merchant, small merchant, craftsmen, labourers	[unpaid] priest, lawyer, rhetor, teacher, philosopher

Figure 15.1 Institutional criteria for social ranking.

entitlements and rewards because of them. These are extrinsic valuations that carry prestige in a society, regardless of the personal qualities and achievements of individual persons.

In this context, we might mention that discussions of social ranking often invoke authority as criterion of rank. Authority is the ability to control the behaviour of others. Authority in this sense exists in all societies and across ranks. There is always some form of recognized entitlement by which some individuals control the acts of others, even when the control may conflict with the immediate wishes of those subject to it. Since power, influence, inducement and commitment activation are in fact ways of having effect on others, they are dimensions of authority. Which of the four is most significant depends, of course, on the institutional arrangements of the social system in question.

Intrinsic (personal) criteria of ranking

To round out the ranking criteria we ought to note two significant *intrinsic* valuations as well: personal qualities and achievements. These intrinsic valuations inhere in the individual person, not in the status or role (office). *Personal qualities* look to the sort of person an individual is considered to be, in terms of culturally valued qualities: beautiful, witty, wise, strong, pious, possessed by spirits, and so on. *Achievement* relates to what a person does, in terms of culturally valued acts: endurance of pain or deprivation (ascetic achievements of monks, hermits, saints, and so on), military prowess, technological skills, intellectual insight, commercial success, and artistic accomplishments. The intrinsic criteria of personal qualities and achievements are used to assess persons within rankings determined by the previous four extrinsic criteria. They are often the prerequisites for consideration of individuals on the customary and legal rank-order scale. For instance, only individuals who are persons defined by custom or law fall into the major ranking systems. Those who are outsiders in any sense are excluded: slaves, foreigners, unbelievers, untouchables, exiles, the hopelessly ill, and the like. These latter are considered to belong to another social system, to be 'outside the pale', or even in an entirely different category of being, a different species (e.g. slaves for Romans; gentiles for Israel). The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic valuations is closely related to the distinction between esteem and prestige. A good slave or good gentile may be held in high esteem (intrinsic criterion) but be invested with no prestige (extrinsic criterion). The first is a valuation of personal qualities or performance of an accepted role; the second is a valuation of ranking in the social system.

Criteria of intrinsic valuations tend to be applied in egalitarian fashion. For instance, the religious concept of the person as having an inviolable soul accountable only to God, a concept current in our culture, gives everyone some positive value. It establishes a floor below which devaluation of the human individual cannot go. In the first-century Mediterranean and later, a number of associations, including Jesus groups, valued members equally, dismissing extrinsic criteria (notably native origin and slave status), while underscoring intrinsic ones (personal qualities and achievements for the association). In contrast, by the criteria of extrinsic valuation there are

persons and groups that are of negative value, if not totally valueless, so that outgroups, outcasts, outlaws are always outranked.

Historical filters required for applying the criteria

To appreciate how criteria of valuation were applied in Mediterranean societies of antiquity, one must realize that a number of perspectives presently available to twenty-first-century Western persons were entirely lacking. For example, there was no belief in some universal nature common to all human offspring. Criteria for human being were always social. All humans were perceived as belonging to distinctive peoples, to the extent that each people was a species rather different from other peoples, as distinct as lion and dog. Both lions and dogs are animals, but quite distinct and different animals. So too human beings. Aside from Roman views of the general (i.e. catholic) inhabited circum-Mediterranean (the *oikoumene*) as their world (the *orbs terrarum*), people had no universalistic political pretensions. There were no nation-states, only distinct peoples (*ethnos*) with origins rooted in distinctive territories. There was no international law. Roman statesmen dealt with other peoples in terms of good faith (*fides*) based on the analogy of interpersonal clientelism. Rome was patron, not holder of an empire; Roman elites wanted persons to behave like clients. To behave otherwise was to be shameless and dishonourable, the characteristics of rebels and outlaws. No one in antiquity believed all human beings could be endowed with equal rights. Human beings, like their gods and stars, were tied to locales and ingroups. Since people in antiquity believed that people existed as various species (*genos*), allegiances always followed ingroup/outgroup patterns. Various peoples, males and females, free men and slaves, aristocrats and plebeians, formed various sub-species determined by the dispositions of nature and the counter position of the valued standing. Individuals are best known by the non-psychological, stereotypical qualities of their groups, and essentially represented their groups. They lived in collectivistic cultures, and their main concern was group integrity (never self-reliance or self-identity). There was no sense of history in the sense of a belief that things were once different and need not be the way they are. In fact human beings were always the same, even if their societies were in the process of devolution. Hence the value of knowing the past for the present. There was surely no social criticism. And there is no evidence of psychological empathy either. Economics was not *the* social institution. In sum, nearly all the modes of perception presently available to and in vogue among twenty-first-century Western Christians, whether liberal or conservative, simply did not exist in the first-century Mediterranean (see Veyne 1989 *passim*; Hanson and Oakman 1998).

Institutional arrangements in antiquity

As a general rule, modern Western nations use inducement (that is, wealth) as the main indicator of rank, ever since the separation of business and state experienced by Adam Smith, then articulated by Karl Marx and Max Weber, and rather fully realized in the industrialized West. Because the economic institution has become the focal social institution in the industrialized West, social class, that is ranking by

wealth, is the main indicator of social rank. While the political institution is quite significant, it is wealth that controls and acquires political power. In antiquity it was vice versa; the political institution acquired and controlled wealth. Once economics became the focal social institution in the industrialized West, the result was that all rankings that counted publicly were economic rankings. Quantity orientation (statistics, proportions, grades, size of membership, of following, of adherents and the like) became the norm. Wealth could be converted into power (investments are protected by national law enforcement agencies and nation-state armies), into influence (the opinion of the wealthy matter, regardless of their actual level of ignorance), and even into commitment and solidarity (wealthy benefactors deserve adulation, affection, loyalty, the votes of grateful politicians). The present Western outlook is that money can buy anything, and that everybody has their price. The fact is that historically, this highlighting of wealth as the overwhelmingly important determiner of social ranking and social effectiveness is rather new, not antedating the Industrial Revolution. Most studies of the social ranking of early Jesus groups focus on their social class, rooted anachronistically and ethnocentrically in wealth rankings. However, when people in the ancient world evaluated each other in terms of social standing, wealth was not the significant or major criterion at all (see Carney 1975 *passim*).

Rather, the focal social institution of ancient Mediterranean societies was kinship. Politics, dealing with effective collective action, became a focal concern within those organizational arrangements called 'cities' (which always included surrounding villages, towns and lands). Politics was the concern of a select group of 'city' kinship groups that constituted local elites. For elites, the city house was a secondary dwelling. It was not a private place like the dwellings of the city non-elite. Rather the elite city house was multifunctional, a place of constant social, economic, and sometimes political intercourse, not simply a place of habitation. The primary elite residence was the elite country estate, a place of residence and subsistence (family plus land and buildings for production, distribution, transmission, reproduction, group identification). Non-elite farmers and tenants imagined their limited holdings in terms of the ideal, the elite country estate.

Rome was a city that expanded its political web to include most other cities in the Mediterranean basin. Empire and City (*urbs*) blended into a single entity, with the City at its social geographical centre. The institutions we call religion and economics were embedded in kinship and politics. Thus ancient Mediterraneans were aware of domestic religion (gods of kin group and ancestors) and domestic economy (producers and consumers were the same). They were equally aware of political religion (temple systems and deities of specific peoples) and political economy (goods and services for elites only). But there was no focus on economics or religion apart from kinship or politics. Thus there would be no economic or religious ranking of any significance in itself to persons of the time. Rankings were domestic and political. Similarly, unless economic or religious benefits could be converted into kinship or political advantage, such benefits would be socially meaningless and unnoticed. Thus 'religious' conversion of any sort had to yield kinship or political advantage.

Specifically, political religion employed the roles, values, and goals of politics in

the articulation and expression of religion: religious functionaries were political personages, focus was on the deity(ies) as source of power and might, expected to provide order, wellbeing and prosperity for the body politic and its power wielders (elites) to the benefit of subjects. In monarchic city-territories of the Eastern Mediterranean, temples were political buildings, temple sacrifices were for the public good; the deity of the temple had a staff similar to the one a monarch had in the palace (major domo = high priest; officials of various ranks and grades = priests, levites; temple slaves and the like; see Elliott 1991). 'Democratic' cities controlled by local elites altered monarchic temples into democratic ones, owned and run by city councils or noble council members, with sacrifice offered according to the wishes of the sacrificing entity.

On the other hand, domestic religion used the roles, values, and goals of the household in the articulation and expression of religion: religious functionaries were domestic personages (notably fathers and, inside the household, mothers as well, oldest sons, ancestors), focus was on the deity(ies) as source of solidarity, mutual commitment, and belonging mediated through ancestors, expected to provide wellbeing, health, and prosperity for the kin group and its patriarchs to the benefit of family members. The house had its altars and sacred rites (focused on the family meal and the hearth as symbols of life) with father (patriarch) and mother (first in charge at home) officiating. Deities were tribal and/or household ones (e.g. God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc.) as well as ancestors who saw to the wellbeing, prosperity and fertility of the family members. There is much concern about inheritance and the legitimacy of heirs. Domestic religion seeks meaning through belonging: an ultimately meaningful existence derives from belonging, e.g. to a chosen, select, holy people. In well-ordered societies, it is belonging within the proper ranking in one's well-ordered society (often called hierarchy). In societies in some disarray, it is belonging to a proper kin and/or fictive-kin group (see Malina 1986a, 1994, 1996a). The ingroup/outgroup pattern marking kinship boundaries served as marker between families as well as between the kin group's political unit and the rest of the world.

Consequently 'conversion' meant joining a political-religious group or kinship-religious group for political or kinship advantage. When people spoke of different religions, they always meant the ideology and behaviour of different political religions or kinship religions. Groups patterned after kinship groups and offering kinship advantage are called fictive-kinship groups. In the Roman empire, these included *collegia*, clubs, associations, and 'gatherings' (*synagōgē*) or 'convocations' (*ekklesiā*). Fictive-kinship religions formed different family-like associations focused on some specific deity or deities. Jesus groups gathered in the name of Jesus to worship the God revealed in the experience of Jesus as well as for the mutual support and nurture of group members. Note that the qualities sought in a Jesus group supervisor (usually translated 'bishop') were those of a decent head of family (1 Tim 3:1–7; see the *Didascalia Apostolorum* [a Syrian work from the first part of the third century], Connolly [1929] 1969: 28–36). Any association might split into various but related groupings, called *haireses* in Greek. There were such divergent, spin-off 'heretical groups' in medicine, philosophy and religion. Heretical groups were considered family deviants distancing themselves from the family of origin for some reason or other. It was family ties that served as model for heretical categories. Thus

from the viewpoint of Jesus groups, all Israelite groups (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes) were 'heretical', and listed as such in the listings of heresies compiled in antiquity (e.g. by Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and even Epiphanius). This is important, since well into the fourth century these Israelite groups continued to be seen as family members gone astray. They were not considered another religion, like another, unrelated family group! After all, Jesus groups formed the first Palestinian rooted form of non-Temple Israelite religion (kinship religion). After the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE, Jesus groups were followed in this by scribal Pharisaic groups that remained largely reclusive. Hence after that destruction, Jesus groups claimed to be true Israel (Matthew's gospel), or the only real Judaeans (Rev. 2:9). It was only with the Pharisaic emphasis on the Mishnah or Second Torah, the formation of a rabbinic order and the composition of the Talmud as focus of norms that a formal break between Pharisaic Judaeans and others, including Jesus groups, was distinctly perceptible (fifth century CE). When Jesus group behaviours were transformed into official political religion by Theodosius (381 CE), 'heretical' groups were no longer 'heretical' (the viewpoint of fictive kinship religion) but traitor groups (the viewpoint of political religion).

Ranking in the Roman empire

In the period during which Jesus groups emerged and developed, the focal social institution was undoubtedly kinship; the secondary social institution of significance was politics, controlled, of course, by persons from the right families. Note Paul's rank indicators:

For consider your call, brothers; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus . . .

(1 Cor. 1:26–30)

What is significant in the ranking categories is the absence of wealth (a feature underscored in Jer. 9:23 LXX, Paul's presumed source). Instead we find wisdom and folly (influence), strong and weak (power), and noble birth and low, despised birth (commitment activation). And a few centuries later, we find Origen's statement of a self-evident truism about his society:

Among men noble birth, honorable and distinguished parents, an upbringing at the hands of wealthy people who are able to spend money on the education of their son, and a great and famous native country, are things which help to make a man famous and distinguished and get his name well known.

(Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.29; Chadwick 1965: 28)

Here it is noble birth from honourable and distinguished parents, themselves well-born (indicated by disposable wealth for education) in a great and famous native

country that make a person distinguished. Thus it is kinship with economics embedded that determines social rank.

All peoples in the Roman empire saw an individual's position determined for life by membership in a kinship group (by birth, actual or symbolic, e.g. adoption, honorary award). Thus every consideration for rank placement is excluded apart from birth. This points to kinship as the focal social institution, with membership in a kinship unit as determinative of rank. Hellenistic society, the cultural arrangement of the Roman empire, was a caste-like society. It was a system of birth-ascribed groups each of which comprised for its members the maximum limit of status-equal interaction. Between adjacent birth-ascribed groups, interaction was consistently hierarchical. Individuals within elite ranks might compete with other elites, giving the semblance of social mobility, for people might go up and down a social scale within quite specified categories. But individuals from non-elite families could never move into elite ranks. And demoted and exiled elites remained elites none the less.

In the kinship group, formal relationship with the father (*paterfamilias*) was vertical (power based), while informal relationship was horizontal (commitment, solidarity). On the other hand relationship with other family members was horizontal (based in solidarity and loyalty). Kinship ranking was based on parenting, age, gender, and intrinsic qualities of value to the integrity of the kin group. There were three forms of family: Roman, Greek and Middle-Eastern, and these family forms underpinned the other social institutions (see Todd 1985; Guijarro 1995, 1997). All kinship groups were situated in birth-based groups ranked by what the Romans called *origo* (synonymous with the Greek: *genesis* = origin; *oikos* = house; *ethnos* = a specific people). Names of peoples and tribes, just as family names, pointed back to *origo*, the first and paramount indicator of family rank. *Origo* normally meant descent from a male citizen of city/territory (*colonia*, *municipium*, *civitas*, or *polis*). Of course there were problems applying this category to the Eastern Mediterranean since natives did not have citizenship in any Greek or Roman sense. Rather they were subjects of a monarch appointed by a deity. It seems probable that in the case of Roman Palestine, the Romans considered Jerusalem a *polis* with the rest of Judaea as its territory. 'Hadrian laid down by *edictum* that local citizenship was created by *origo*, manumission (by a citizen of the place), adlection or adoption, while the status of *incola* (non-citizen resident) arose from the establishment of *domicilium* in a place (*Corpus Juris* 10.40.7)' (Millar 1983: 80). This legal arrangement lasted until the edict of Caracalla of 212, but the sentiment survived.

It was the set of customs typical of each of the various peoples of the empire that determined the shape kinship took among each of those peoples. Customs are institution-specific norms and behaviours. In the Roman empire, as in caste-like societies in general, the upper groups control the criteria for ranking and successfully impose their standards upon the whole society. In a long established caste-like order, at least under the conditions of a stable agricultural society, a justifying ideology can come to be so widely accepted that even in the lower castes the standards of the dominant orders become the criteria of ranking. People come to realize that they are ranked before others because of the deference they are shown and

the esteem in which they are held. This makes it rather easy for elites to attempt to set the scale for the entire population, unlike industrialized societies which are highly mobile, competitive systems, hence with a considerable and effective range of disagreement. While in the industrialized West differently located strata will emphasize different criteria of ranking, in antiquity it was segments of society that emphasized different criteria.

Roman custom ranked its kin-groups in terms of '*ordines*'. The Roman orders set out a prominence scale of emperor, senators, equestrians and plebeians as the significant social positions (for Roman rank insignia, see Treggiari 1996; for rank colours, Casartelli 1998). From the second century on, the elite orders (senator, equestrian) were labelled *honestior*, the others *humilior*. This was a scale of precedence, of who came first, second and so forth in terms of the traditional noble and non-noble families. Law formally is the institutionalization of the customs constituting one institution (e.g. kinship norms) by another institution (e.g. politics). When the Roman political institution institutionalized Roman family ranks jurally, as part of Roman law, these orders were no longer horizontal arrangements of prominence. They became vertical arrangements of eminence (see Malina 1986a). The Roman political institution, well rooted in kinship, became the primary and major concern largely of the well-born, landed 'first' families. The main symbol of being well-born was membership in a Roman, patrician kin group which invariably had extensive holdings in land and slaves. So too around the empire, the heads of the 'first' families were the local 'citizens' who were members (*decuriones*) of town/city councils entrusted with control of the collectivity, the town/city and its surrounding territory. Thanks to these well-born personages and their kin groups, during its first four centuries of existence the early Roman empire rested on a network of cities, whose elites were capable both of conspicuous expenditure locally, in the form of public buildings, show and festivals, and of carrying many of the functions of government.

Kinship relations had effect through commitment activation; that is, through requirements of ingroup solidarity and loyalty. Political relations had effect through power; that is, through the threat of force, normally carried out by the military. Hence if we look for social standing in the ancient Mediterranean, individuals would occupy ranking positions in two major institutions: kinship and politics. The value of such ranking positions was determined by counter positions in these institutions. These, in turn, entailed two major role sets: kinship roles and political roles.

What determines whether one treats another in terms of political (power) symbols or in terms of kinship (commitment activation) symbols? The choice of medium of interaction depended upon ingroup/outgroup relationship of the interacting individuals (or groups). Ingroup members treat each other in terms of the horizontal dimensions of kinship, while outgroup individuals and groups are treated in terms of the vertical dimensions of the political institution. Consequently, for the prominent persons of the empire, the fitting approach for dealing with the outgroup was power, while the fitting approach for dealing with the ingroup was solidary loyalty. The exercise of such loyalty across rank dividers was described by the role of patron. Patrons dealt with their non-elite clients along the pathways of fictive kinship. Patronage served to 'kinify' social relations with other members of the body politic (see Malina 1996b). Thus while the emperor was in fact 'commander in chief

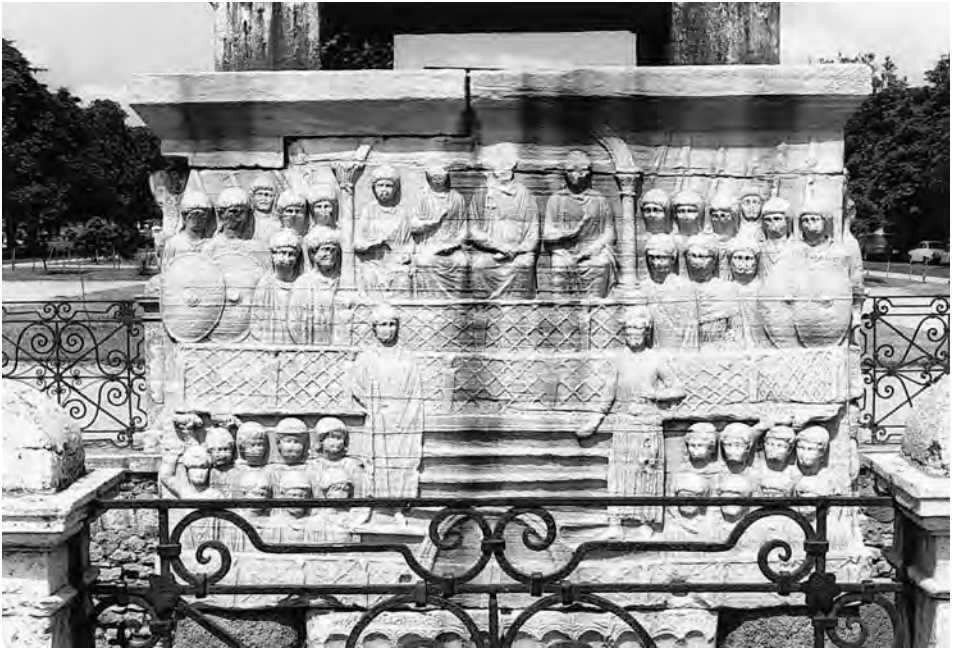


Figure 15.2 The emperor Theodosius I with courtiers and bodyguards from an obelisk in the Hippodrome in Constantinople erected in 390 CE. He was the last emperor to rule a united empire of East and West. Photo The Courtauld Institute of Art, Somerset House, The Strand, London.

(which is what ‘*imperator*’ means) to the outgroup, for the ingroup ‘imperial activity typically consisted in the formulation of responses to individual cases’ (Millar 1983: 76). The emperor had to be asked; he did not command the ingroup. Yet once he gave his responses on particular issues, these often served as the basis for a more general ruling by the same emperor or a later one. But such imperial rulings were not laws to be enforced by the governmental apparatus (power); rather they were simply ‘available for use by interested parties making claims or bringing suits, and then by officials or emperors, giving rulings in response’ to the suits (Millar 1983: 77). Such responses to requests dealt with civil or criminal questions as well as with the social and communal life of the provinces. As patron (*pater patriae*) the emperor dispensed favours, exceptions, and exemptions, usually in response to requests from individuals or groups. See Figure 8.2 for a model of social ranking in Herodian Palestine; the same pattern was replicated *mutatis mutandis* in other political units (e.g. the city with its territories, of the empire).

Outgroup ranking of Jesus followers in the empire before Constantine

It was with Constantine’s convoking the Council of Nicaea in 324 that scattered Jesus groups for the first time were enabled to envision themselves as a single

church. In an empire of some 60 million persons, from the number of bishops present in Nicaea one may conclude that the number of Jesus group members at the time was *c.* 880,000, the result of a growth rate of *c.* 2.5 per cent per year. (There were 220 bishops present, and each could maintain a maximum social network of some 4,000 persons in a face-to-face society; see Boissevain 1974). As for Roman elites, 'if we include wives and daughters, we must reckon on an absolute minimum of 5000 members of the senatorial order between 180 and 312. But among these 5000, we can identify only ten Christians . . . , i.e. 0.2 per cent' (Barnes 1995: 136). Similarly, given the number and size of buildings traceable to Jesus groups in Rome by the fourth century, about 7,000 people (1.4 per cent of a population of half a million; see Storey 1997) could gather at any one time in Rome's 24 tituli and eight ancient churches. By the sixth century, new buildings would allow for a total gathering of 11,000 (2.2 per cent of the populace; see map in Chadwick and Evans 1987: 20–1). From Constantine on, apart from an interlude under Constans (340–50), many appointees to high office were Jesus group members from the senatorial aristocracy (Barnes 1995: 144; 145–7 for lists of names).

By any reckoning, the number of Jesus group members before Constantine was quite small. One obvious reason for this was that there were very few non-Israelites joining Jesus groups. The fact is that the Jesus movement in all of its many forms was essentially an Israelite phenomenon with an Israelite ideology of direct interest to members of the house of Israel, whom the Hellenists called 'Judeans'. Since associations of *Christianoi* grew by means of social networking among Judeans spread around the Mediterranean, it would seem that the pool of available members was confined to immigrant Israelites around the region with little significant contact with non-Israelites (on networking, see Boissevain 1974, 1989; Marsden and Lin 1982; for the New Testament period, White 1992). Given the boundaries of this network, the only ones to whom the ideology and theology of the various Jesus groups made sense were members of the house of Israel – in this case, resident alien Judeans throughout the cities of the Roman empire who fell outside the sphere of the budding Pharisaic ideology of scribal Judaism.

Non-Judean Mediterranean traditionalists would not find much attractive about joining and belonging to a fictive-kin group consisting of Judean resident aliens and deriving from Israelite ideology, morality, and worship forms, whether a Jesus group or not. Even a narrator as sensitive to Hellenism as was Luke insisted that his central personages in the second half of Acts made their initial contacts exclusively in Judean communities across the Eastern Mediterranean (e.g. at synagogues in Antioch of Pisidia, Acts 13:14; Iconium, Acts 14:1; Thessalonica, Acts 17:1; Berea, Acts 17:10; Athens, Acts 17:17; Corinth, Acts 18:4; Ephesus, Acts 18:19). 'Missionaries' like Paul founded Jesus groups in cities because that is where the Judean population was to be found 'among the gentiles'. The whole purpose of 'mission' was to let all Israel know about Jesus as Israel's forthcoming Messiah. Jesus group members professed that Jesus was raised by the God of Israel. This God was believed to be the creator, lord and ruler over all that exists. Early on, Jesus group members divided into two major currents. First there were the Jesus *Messianists* whose central belief was that Jesus was Messiah of Israel alone; the God whom they worshipped was Israel's God, superior to all other gods (Eusebius calls these groups

in his day 'Ebionites', *H. E.* 3.27.1–6). However, with the unexpected advent of a sprinkling of non-Israelites among Jesus groups, some Jesus Messianists saw this as God's initiative and developed a new ideology. The result was the emergence of Jesus *Resurrectionist* groups, for whom the God of Israel revealed himself to be the sole and only God of humankind, a universal divine monarch, 'like an emperor of the world, of infinite power and majesty' (Tertullian, *Apol.* 24.3). Jesus, in turn, was no longer Israel's forthcoming Messiah, but cosmic Lord – a role variously explicated (Epiphanius lists 80 different viewpoints, Augustine 88 and Philastrius of Brescia 150, held by spin-off groups called 'heresies'; see Hopkins 1998: 187). For Mediterranean traditionalists, this sort of arrangement with a universal divine monarchy negated the supremacy of local deities that populated the city-territories of the empire, including Israel. Furthermore, the fact that this single divine monarch oversaw everything people did would be a problem for political religion, concerned with local deities. While Stoics claimed God was providential and knew everything, this Stoic God turned out to be the many local gods of the empire (see Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.14.11–13).

In sum, a typically Judaeon movement focused on an Israelite Messiah and reworked into a monotheistic experience increased the potential appeal of the Jesus movement among Mediterranean Judaeans. On the basis of existing theories of network, it would seem that the vast majority of pre-Constantinian Jesus group members were indeed of the house of Israel, even if not a major segment of Mediterranean Judaeans. On the other hand, it is important not to mistake the Pharisaic scribal Judaism of the fifth and sixth centuries for the dominant Judaism of the Hellenized communities of the second to fourth centuries (see Stark 1996: 64). The fact is that Jesus groups, orthodox as well as heretical, were found almost exclusively in city-territories where there was a significant Judaeon presence (in Egypt, Syria, Phrygia, Asia Minor, North Africa, Mesopotamia), or in Judaeon quarters of cities (e.g. Rome, Alexandria, Antioch).

Jesus Messianists (who expected Jesus as Messiah soon), and Jesus Resurrectionists groups (who saw a new revelation of God in the raising of Jesus), themselves develop into a number of forms of associational domestic religion (fictive-kin groups), whether named by locality: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Roman Palestine or even Dura-Europos, or by central personages: Simon Magus, Nicolaus, Menander, Cerinthus, Carpocrates, Saturninus, Basilides, Cerdo, Apelles, Valentinus, Marcion, Montanus, or by distinctive ideological takes: Ebionites, Encratites, Adoptionists, Patripassionists, Quartodecimans, and the like.

The social ranking of Jesus group members before Constantine

The problem with the question of the social rank of Jesus groups is that the quality of being a Jesus group member did not fall among the *extrinsic* criteria of rank. Group membership was an *intrinsic* quality inhering in the person. Graeco-Roman culture did not rank by collegia, associations or club membership if they were fictive-kin groups. Political associations were another matter.

In terms of the general social system of the empire, Jesus followers and their families would fall within the ranking patterns typical of Judaeon immigrants of the

period. In general, they fell within the general vertical classification scheme of the empire as well as within the specific vertical classification scheme of the regional and local communities. These classifications would indicate outgroup power ranking; that is, where Jesus group members stood relative to society at large. For the period before Constantine, as previously noted, there simply were but ten Roman aristocrats who belonged to Jesus groups (Barnes 1995). After Constantine the number of Roman aristocrats markedly increased. Who were pre-Constantinian Jesus group members?

Caracalla's edict of 212 extended Roman citizenship to every free person throughout the empire. Thus progressive 'Romanization' ended up with 80 per cent of the citizenry being descendants of slaves. 'The conclusion is that at Rome any connection between citizenship and ethnicity was attenuated to the point where it was practically nonexistent' (Cornell 1991: 65). Obviously *origo* lost its central value, but not genealogy. Well-born elites remained elites. For most people, ranking criteria of greatest significance still derived from the family situation in the local/regional community, discernible from the occupation of the domestic group (domestic economy). What criteria were in vogue?

Occupation was considered an intrinsic quality. Given the occupational ranking criteria set out by Cicero (in *De officiis* 1.42, derived from Panaetius, hence representative of Hellenistic conceptions), we may note the following. In family ranking in terms of occupation, highest in rank were activities that entailed ownership of large tracts of land worked by many slaves, thus allowing for leisure time and activities for which one received no remuneration at all. This was the agriculture engaged in by Roman senatorial and equestrian ranks, patrician families and local elites around the Mediterranean. Further, while equestrians were noble by birth and activity (agriculture and generally long-distance trade), they were remunerated by the emperor. Then, professions that looked for wages at all were not totally honourable. Thus, the *artes* (Greek: *technai*) of healing, architecture and teaching in the honourable disciplines (included are grammar, rhetoric, and philosophy) were respectable only if one exercised them as an amateur, not if one wanted to earn one's daily bread from them. However, these practised for recompense ranked people between the elites and the masses. Hopkins guesses this group to have formed *c.* 2 per cent of the population 'of whom at most half possessed sophisticated and fluent literacy'. These were

middling land-owners, merchants, professionals, such as lawyers, doctors, architects, professors of rhetoric and philosophy, middling and lesser administrators, army officers, scribes, school-teachers, and eventually Christian ideologues. These sub-elites were probably particularly concentrated in the metropolitan centers (Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Carthage), in the larger cities (such as Ephesus, Corinth or Milan) and in merchant ports (Puteoli, Ostia, Cadiz) and the university town of Athens.

(Hopkins 1998: 208–9)

Next came any activity performed by free men that required manual labour, and these according to their social quality (for a similar assessment of social quality in Israel, see Jeremias 1969; Stegemann and Stegemann 1995). Finally there were the

same activities performed by freed men followed by slaves and the social rejects (on slaves see Llewelyn 1998: 1–46; good data, often questionable interpretation).

Occupation thus pointed to kinship ranking in a local system. In Rome as in other ‘cities’ that patterned themselves on Rome, political ranking began with the local monarch or city-territory council members, persons from families whose domestic economy left them free to spend all their time on local political affairs. This ability pointed to prominent ranking. The ideal in the system was the totally ‘free man’, a male free of personal, political and economic constraints. It was among the ranks of such prominent free men that the emperor sought to bestow *honores* (*archai*) and *munera* (*leitourgia*): ‘personal or financial obligations imposed on individuals, without being actual offices, and performed either for the city or (directly or indirectly) for the Roman state’ (Millar 1983: 78). These involved public works (roads, buildings, sewers, water supply, and the like) and public services (fire department, cartage, and the like). When individuals were appointed to some honour, they had to pay for all the material and personnel involved. Of course there were ways to be exempt from the obligations: get an exemption from the emperor or, more honourably, take an official position in the imperial service giving lifelong immunity from the foregoing obligations.

There never was any ‘class struggle’ in the Roman empire. But there were frequent status struggles, struggle over social position in the same ranking categories (for example, among senators, equestrians, decuriones), that continued during the life of the empire.

The relevant statuses were acquired by individuals in the course of their lives as a result of specific official action, bore either a genuine or a nominal relation to actual office-holding, could be subject to deprivation, and were not transferable to the next generation. What is more, we see in this period not only the emergence of a set of ranks and statuses with very specific and important social consequences, but . . . the period from the second to the fourth century saw the emergence, first, of honourific appellations in adjectival form, *egregius*, *perfectissimus*, *clarissimus*, and then of the related nouns denoting formal statuses or ranks, *egregiatus*, *perfectissimatus*, *clarissimatus*.

(Millar 1983: 79)

In sum, where did Jesus group members fit into this framework? First of all, as previously noted, there simply were no significant numbers of Roman elites in their ranks until Constantine. Second, they were to be found largely in city-territories, notably in Judaeian quarters or among citizens and resident aliens of Judaeian ‘origo’. Their occupational ranking matched that of other immigrant Judaeans. Evidence for this can be seen from the persons addressed by such writers as Ignatius of Antioch for Asia Minor, Clement of Alexandria for his city-territory (see Kyrtatas 1987), Tertullian for his section of North Africa, Clement of Rome and the like. The persons they address are for the most part city merchants and craftsmen that are quite ‘comfortable’ for persons who are non-elites and often non-citizens. Aside from provocation normally incited by arrogant challenges from persons who insist they were the ‘chosen’ people, conflict arose in the Roman empire largely because Jesus group associations were viewed as secret societies capable of political dis-

order (e.g. Pliny the Younger reports Christians accused of *flagitia*, shameful behaviour).

The social ranking of Jesus group members after Constantine

In the early fourth century, Constantine declared the religious ideology and behaviour of Jesus Resurrectionists as a recognized political religion in the empire. His decision was rooted in the Graeco-Roman approach to the gods, which was a sort of nothing ventured nothing gained attitude, especially in situations of need. Since all goods were limited, if a god gave in and granted a favour, one was owed in return. The behaviour expressing this approach was called a vow. Vows were a sort of '*do ut des*' ('I give so that you might give') contract, taken in the same spirit as such vows are taken today in the Mediterranean, as witnessed by the countless votive offerings in countless churches in the region. For example, Macmullen notes the case of Pachomius, the monk:

[H]e himself was won over through a bargain he struck when he was held in close custody against draft-dodging. 'If you set me free from this affliction', he prayed to God, 'I will serve your will all the days of my life.'

(Macmullen 1983: 185)

He further notes that such was the basis of Constantine's conversion, a conversion based on political advantage! Constantine, too, made an oath in a '*do ut des*' vein relative to military victory. Some seek a deeper reason for Constantine's making Jesus Resurrectionism a legal religion in his empire beside his oath. For example, some see Jesus groups as viable networks providing allegiance, loyalty, and functional utility as a legal religion. Rather, what was distinctive of Jesus groups at this stage was that their 'orthodox' forms developed into a Catholicizing monotheism, with membership open to all human beings. It was the monotheism with its attendant sky–earth contact in one Lord that was most attractive for an emperor seeking unity and allegiance to one emperor. Diocletian sought this unity and allegiance in emphasizing traditional Roman henotheism, but it did not serve to unite a world embracing imperium East and West. It lacked a sky–earth contact. Much as Caracalla offered Roman citizenship to all in the empire, Constantine, by adopting Jesus Resurrectionism, legalized a monotheism open to all in the empire. But Constantine raised Jesus as mediator to the ranks of the divinity, while he himself served as Pontifex Maximus in the new arrangement, i.e. as sky–earth contact. So with one God and one Lord, there was now one Emperor of all.

With Jesus Resurrectionism now a legal approach to the deity(ies), a political religion, the number of Roman elites joining the ranks increased, notably among those serving in public offices. It is Jesus Resurrectionism as a political religion that best characterizes Christendom. Now the Christian emerges, specifically as a political religionist.

If we consider the rank of those rather newly minted Christians who went to the new church buildings and heard the sermons of eminent bishops, one thing becomes clear from the sermons they heard. Churchgoers were essentially elites. An analysis of the sermons of John Chrysostom of Antioch (as well as a quick view of Basil,

Jerome, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Asterius of Amaseia in the eastern empire; and Augustine, Zeno, Maximus of Turin, Gaudentius) indicate that their church audience normally were high ranking personages, 'idle from choice' (in Matt. 35.4; PG 57.409), with slaves in attendance so they might proclaim their proper place in society. Even a priest had to have at least one slave in order to maintain appearance (in ep. ad Phil. 2 homil. 9.4; PG 2.251). For all of these authors, the 'poor' were small landowners (even with a villa to sell, with slaves, etc.; see Macmullen 1989: 502, n. 2 for Chrysostom; 509, n. 16 for Augustine), petty merchants, craftsmen and the like. Thus the significant non-elite of pre-Constantinian times are displaced by the elite. And more significantly, non-Israelites take the ascendancy; Jesus Messianism is simply dismissed as deviant. Those Christians of Judean origin and custom who constituted Jesus Messianist groups are considered as not belonging to Christendom at all, but as forming a distinct outgroup (see Eusebius, *H. E.* 3.17.1–6; 6.17.1–2). Quite a turn of events.

In this period, the peasantry from the surrounding countryside (more than 75 per cent of the Christian population, says Macmullen 1989) was left largely to its own devices, beyond the reach of the city church except for the great festival/fair days. On those days, they gathered in immemorial fashion to banquet together at sacred (now martyrs') shrines, where they might be addressed by the bishop. As the story and behaviours of Christendom were appropriated by country folk, many curious and interesting 'Christian' practices emerged that would become Christian tradition.

MORALITY

Morality is about the quality and direction of human behaviour. Moral norms and directives for human behaviour might derive from self-contained ethical systems, divine revelations or authoritative declarations. Systems reasoned out by competent human beings included Stoicism, Pythagorism, Israelite scribalism, Paul's 'in Christ' system, further developed by his successors, and the like. On the other hand, moral directives might derive from divine revelation to a prophet (like Moses, John the Baptist, Jesus, Jesus group prophets) or from the authoritative directives of a holy man (Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke). Moral norms articulate the quality and directions of behaviour considered acceptable for agents, outcomes and circumstances of human actions. In other words, human actions are performed by persons who interact with others in specific contexts. Moral norms allow for the evaluating of the quality of a piece of human behaviour in terms of those who are acting, those upon whom they act, and what it is that persons do to others in given circumstances.

In assessing Christian morality of the first four centuries, there is often a fusion of sources: Scripture says (divine directive), Jesus said/did (holy man), Jesus group members must ('in Christ' systems). However, early on Jesus Resurrectionist groups rejected that section of the Mosaic Law that came after Israel's worshipping of the golden calf. Paul rejects these Torah prescriptions out of hand (Gal. 5:2–6); the author of the *Letter of Barnabas* keeps them but interprets them allegorically, while the author of the *Didascalia Apostolorum* speaks of the 'Second Legislation' (in Hebrew: *Mishnah*) as follows:

For the first Law is that which the Lord God spoke before the people had made the calf and served idols, which consists of the Ten Words and the Judgements. But after they had served idols, He justly laid upon them the bonds, as they were worthy. But do not therefore lay them upon yourself; for our Savior came for no other cause but to fulfil the Law, and to set us loose from the bonds of the Second Legislation.

(Connolly [1929] 1969: 14; for the same argument, see Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 4.25.3; 4.26.1; 4.28)

Be that as it may, what all these sources of moral directives have in common is that they are rooted in the Eastern Mediterranean culture area. The norms they proclaim are variations on similar cultural themes that characterize the morality of early Jesus groups.

Agents

Jesus group members, like their fellow Mediterraneans, were individual persons in collectivistic cultures. Their principal concern in life was family or group integrity. They saw the world in terms of ingroups and outgroups, and it was the ingroups that deserved their loyalty. Outgroups were often viewed as secondary forms of humanity, even different species (for example, note the attitude of Israel towards gentiles; Tertullian considered Jesus group members neither Judaeans nor gentiles, hence a 'third category of humanity' (*Scorpiace* 10); so too *Epistle to Diognetus* 1; Eusebius speaks of the tribe, *phylon*, of *Christianoï* (*H. E.* 1.11.8; 3.33.2–3); distinct people, *ethnos* (*H. E.* 4.7.10); species or race, *genos* (*H. E.* 4.15.6). Hence moral principles concerning 'neighbour' were quite circumscribed. Neighbour was limited for the most part to the ingroup, to one's fellow believer in Christ, although there is concern for kin, fellow villagers, residents of the same city quarter, ethnic group and the like. The category, 'neighbour', is never universal (even in Luke's gospel, where Jesus includes the Samaritan in the people of Israel).

Collectivistic persons are non-introspective; they are simply not psychologically minded. This means that all events we might ascribe to psychological, mental or internal sources were generally ascribed to personified entities outside the person: angels, spirits, demons and the like. Another dimension of such collectivism, apparent in the morality of Jesus groups, is the perception of how the world worked. This perception embraced two fundamental principles: human beings are quite controlled in their existence, and as a rule they are not 'personally' responsible for what they do. This was not a warrant for irresponsible action, but rather an awareness that everyday life is controlled by others while one's attempted behaviour is often thwarted. These presuppositions are neatly expressed in Paul's lament: 'For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which wells within me' (*Rom.* 7:19–20).

The non-introspective dimension of collectivist cultures is significant. People believed that behavioural controls existed in the social situation, not in the individual conscience (this is further indicated by required techniques for gender separation). Behavioural controls were not internal to a person, but external and social,

deriving from a set of social structures in which all persons were expected to participate and to which they were to adhere. Hence behavioural controls were definitely not 'psychological', individualistic, inwardly assimilated and under the control of the choice of 'conscience'. It was situations that were controlled and that controlled, not individual persons following internalized norms. People expected to be watched, to allow their behaviour to be transparent to others, to conceal nothing unless they were up to no good. Group members invested the controlling and controlled situation with the full force of custom. Consequently, people did not expect others to control their behaviour by following internalized norms; the individual conscience was simply not an ethical norm, sacred or otherwise (Hall 1959: 114). People were expected to mind everyone else's business, while they in turn were watched by others. The early practice of publicly confessing one's sins before the church presumed all previously knew about the deviant behaviour (see Poschmann 1964).

This feature sheds light on the prevailing social sanction for deviance – namely, shame. Shame is public rejection of one's claim to worth. Its positive side, the social reward that ancient Mediterraneans sought above all, was honour: the socially acknowledged claim to worth. (Persons who fail to win an acclaim of honour or who are dishonoured are said to be shamed; on the other hand to have shame is to be concerned about one's honour.) Of course what was to be considered honourable or shameful depended on the various and often conflicting ingroups that characterized Mediterranean societies.

Given the fact that honour derived from the acknowledgement of others and that all behaviour was subject to public scrutiny, it was easy for people to understand they were controlled by external, outside forces, visible and non-visible. This led people to strive to fit into the social situation (rather than to master the environment), to please significant others in their group and acquiesce in their demands (rather than to seek self-satisfaction and self-determination), to be attuned to the wishes of significant others (rather than to ignore their concerns and desires), to avoid ingroup conflict and competition and to be motivated to comply with ingroup values, goals and strategies, with great ingroup involvement (and little if any outgroup involvement). Ingroup members were rewarded for social compliance (not for skills, abilities), largely through grants of honour. Thus, emphasis fell on group affirmation, with self-affirmation considered deviant.

The fact that people did not feel responsibility for the situation in which they found themselves entailed great attention to the power of institutional forces (the power of God, gods, emperor, governor, king and the like) rather than on psychological understanding of a person's motivations, values, feelings and goals. People felt it was humanly impossible to change the obstinate and difficult situations they faced, yet with a source of power outside of themselves (God, gods, demons, spirits, angels, patrons, holy men and the like) they could alter what restricted them.

Consequently, success or failure was due largely to encompassing situations and circumstances (not due to individual skills or inadequacies; individuals have no self-potential to live up to, just assigned tasks). There was a strong relationship between social ranking and success in society (not between individual effort and ability and success). Yet enduring problems pointed to something wrong with society (often called 'the world'), while there was nothing inherently wrong with individuals. For

responsibility was externalized, personified (e.g. original sin, original corruption, evil impulse), but not internalized and personalized.

As for interpersonal behaviour, ingroup members treated each other in terms of the horizontal dimensions of kinship, rather than the power-based vertical dimensions of the political institution. Consequently, among Jesus followers, the fitting approach for dealing with each other was commitment activation based on solidary loyalty. Jesus groups before Constantine were fictive-kin groups in which members interacted in terms of generalized reciprocity: sharing with members of the household without demanding a quick or equal return. Everyone was to receive according to need, to maintain standing in life.

Actions

Since people in Jesus groups were to reverence God and treat each other as fictive kin, they were rated by personal qualities and achievements (intrinsic criteria of ranking) expressed in a fictive-kinship register. Of primary concern were rules meant to prevent dishonouring the God worshipped by the fictive-kin group, that is its domestic religion. Jesus group members were adamantly intolerant of behaviour that compromised God's honour. And dishonour was patent in idolatry and attendant behaviours: eating food sacrificed to idols or visiting temple prostitutes. Similarly, shedding blood and eating blood were prohibited since life (in the blood) belonged to God alone (see specific rules for non-Israelites: Acts 15:19–21, based on rules for resident aliens in Lev. 17:8–9, 10–16; 20:2–5; the prohibition of eating blood was widely practised among Jesus groups: witness Bilbis, who states that *Christianoi* 'are not allowed to eat the blood even of irrational animals', Eusebius, *H. E.* 5.1.25–6; also Tertullian *Apol.* 9: *Christiani* refuse to taste blood or to sacrifice).

Interpersonally, members were to bolster and support each other ('nurture') out of mutual commitment. The values and lines of behaviour which tended to strengthen group cohesion were considered positive values, virtues. On the other hand, those values and lines of behaviour which might in any way be detrimental to group cohesion were considered negative values, vices or sins. Notice that all the ethical inventories were essentially and fundamentally concerned with the maintenance and strengthening of group cohesion centred in God revealed in Jesus. These inventories include the frequently cited interpersonal directives in the traditional Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:2–17; cited in the *Didache*, Barnabas, *Didascalia Apostolorum*, the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, etc.), or the directives of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7, also much cited), or the listing of 'the evil things that come from within and defile a man' (Mark 7:21) or Paul's catalogue of the 'works of the flesh' (Gal. 5:19–21; see 1 Cor. 6:9–10). The personal qualities and achievements of value to the group were those listed in 1 Corinthians 12 (the gifts of the Patron God to group members for their mutual upbuilding).

These inventories highlight and prohibit dysfunctional behaviours that directly lead to ingroup antagonisms and group dissolution, dishonouring the group before outsiders. Certain actions are always prohibited since they are negative, evil. As a rule, the highlighting of such negative prohibitions points to situations that are society specific, of major concern to all since all are aware that the prohibited actions

are simply concretizations of attitudes, values and interests that constantly roil under the surface behaviour of group members. For example, the explicit requirement to honour mother and father presumes a social situation in which offspring were required to support parents and were prone to the non-fulfilment of the obligation. Likewise the explicit prohibition of adultery directed to the general group points to constant interest in challenging one's fellows through their embedded women. Similarly the general and explicit prohibition of false witness surfaces concern in a society where outgroup members simply do not get the truth and should not expect it. The same is true of the generalized prohibition of theft of goods or persons; this points up a society that generally harbours great concern about the material and social well-being of others as a constant threat to the well-being of one's own group. Hence from such explicit prohibition, we often get intimations of the concerns and rhythms of the societies or groups of antiquity. All the directives underscore the central place of kinship and kinship religion in the social system (there are no Ten Commandments for politics or economics).

More specifically, social roles and behaviours that might denigrate the honour of the Jesus group were rated negatively. For example, the third century *Didascalia Apostolorum* urges Jesus group leaders to reject alms deriving from 'works of unrighteousness':

from rich persons who keep men shut up in prison, or ill-treat their slaves, or behave with cruelty in their cities, or oppress the poor; or from the lewd, and those who abuse their bodies; or from evildoers; or from forgers; or from dishonest advocates, or false accusers; or from hypocritical lawyers; or from painters of pictures; or from makers of idols; or from workers of gold and silver and bronze (who are) thieves; or from dishonest tax-gatherers; or from spectators of shows; or from those who alter weights or measure deceitfully; or from inn-keepers who mingle water (with their wine); or from soldiers who act lawlessly; or from murderers; or from spies who procure condemnations; or from any Roman officials who are defiled with wars and have shed innocent blood without trial: perverters of judgement who, in order to rob them, deal unjustly and deceitfully with the peasantry and with all the poor; and from idolaters; or from the unclean; or from those who practise usury, and extortioners.

(Connolly [1929] 1969: 158)

Similarly, the earlier Roman *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus does not allow slaves to join Jesus groups without their owner's permission nor are baptized women to consort with slaves. Possessed persons were to be successfully exorcized before admission to Jesus groups. These directives, moreover, reject persons engaged in the following occupations from membership in Jesus groups: procurers, idol makers, schoolmasters teaching Greek and Roman literature, charioteers and athletes and those who go to athletic games or to gladiatorial shows, arrangers and participants in gladiatorial shows, priests and keepers of idols, soldiers who take the military oath (to kill), military governors, city magistrates, female or male prostitutes, magicians, charmers, astrologers, dream interpreters, amulet makers, males unwilling to marry their concubines. This list is open-ended, asking local groups to add 'if we have omitted anything' (Dix 1968: 24-8).

The actions proscribed in these lists are aspects of the Ten Commandments' prohibitions of idolatry and offences against neighbour. Idolatry and injury to others not only dishonour God, shame others and call for revenge, but cast a negative, dishonourable light on the Jesus groups themselves.

Interacting agents

Ancient Mediterranean society was characterized by persons defined primarily and always in terms of gender, genealogy and geography. While Jesus ingroups abandoned the age-old identity markers of specific peoplehood (that is, genealogy and geography), they did retain gender boundaries. The moral person was a gendered self, not simply a person. The self defined primarily as male or female points to kinship as focal social institution. Like individual selves, so too the kinship group fell into two 'gendered' sides, the father's side of the family (patriline) and the mother's side (matriline). The father's side was the jural side, the legal side, the side of inheritance, of ancestral honour. It included the father's male and female siblings as well. In most Mediterranean languages, the paternal and maternal aunts and uncles are designated quite differently. Interactions with patriline relatives always have jural or legal overtones. Patriarchy entails heavy focus on the patriline.

However, there was also the mother's side of the family. This side was non-jural, non-legal, the side of sibling concern, of solidarity with the mother's brothers and sisters and their offspring. Maternal uncles and aunts dealt with their sister's offspring in non-jural terms. These considerations are important for understanding male and female roles in pre-Constantinian Jesus groups. To begin with, moral interaction took place between persons in roles. The roles that might develop in fictive-kin groups were the roles typical of the non-jural lineage of a kin group.

Mediterranean persons were genealogically gendered selves, even in fictive-kin groups. In society at large, females were much like foetuses in our society: embedded, encysted, engulfed in another person who has customary control over them at all times, until 'birth'. The societal 'birth' equivalent for a female was widowhood, a sort of social maturity. Full social maturity was widowhood with a son. At physical maturity, females remained embedded in some male, and the female function was to link two male spheres together. Unembedded females were an anomaly (e.g. virgins without families, or divorcees). Embedded adult females could act as males when required in the jural line (e.g. defend honour of husband, of family, etc.). In the political order, of course, a female of a higher ranking kin group is worth more than all the males of the ranks below her!

It is important to know the female social position since the male's is a counter position. And in certain institutionalized interactions, males likewise were socially embedded in other males and had to play embedded social roles (the male role on the female side). Thus, embedded adult males were to act like embedded females both in non-jural ingroup relations (with mother's or sister's family), as well as embedded outgroup contexts (e.g. a stranger as guest, as client, as disciple). The male role in non-jural ingroups was that of the mother's brother in respect to the mother and her children. This is a relationship based on previous bonding, on loyalty to a sibling, on concern for the welfare of others related to the sibling. Males in this position have no

jural authority; that is, no legal power to do anything. They were like 'embedded females'. Note that Jesus' directives to take the last place and serve others, or Paul's advice to be subject to one another equally, point to non-jural, 'embedded' male behaviour.

In Jesus fictive-kinship groups, male roles were of the non-jural type since group members were not jurally or legally bound to each other; theirs were elective associations. These non-jural kinship roles, obligations and expectations express prevailing domestic religious roles, obligations and expectations. Roles such as group ancestor, patron, respectful child or client, fictive brother and sister; obligations such as honour, solidarity, respect and remembrance; and expectations such as debts of obligation (loving kindness), mercy, group attachment (love) are some of the qualities of kinship religion found in Jesus groups. While Israel, once a political entity, continued its jural domestic religion, devoted to the god (or gods) of the ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or with ancestral places of worship and pilgrimage, and household altars and household sacrifices such as the Passover, and the like, Jesus Resurrectionists focused on the God who raised Jesus from the dead, the sole God of humankind. Jesus was cosmic Lord. In the whole Mediterranean the hearth was symbol of family life, since light, like life, could not be created but only handed on from some sacred source. Food, too, was sacred. Hence hearth and table were always religious, central to domestic religion. The same is true of associational meetings of Jesus groups. With their non-jural structure, it is no surprise to find alternative states of consciousness experiences as part of these gatherings, not unlike the list described in 1 Corinthians 12 and Paul's own visionary experiences (for Rome, see Quispel 1998).

Achievements, an intrinsic criterion of social rank that gave prestige (first ranking, that is prominence) to group members, included bearing public witness to what God did in the raising of Jesus (martyrdom, with or without death), patronage and benefactions on the group's behalf. Deviants were perceived to have negative personal qualities (pride, greed, lust resulting in disruptive behaviour, factionalism), another intrinsic criterion of social rank, that explained their way of articulating the Jesus story (heresy as discourse) and merited their being labelled deviants and avoided.

The new morality

After Constantine, the structure of these fictive-kin groups changed radically. With the advent of Roman Christendom, as a political religion, fictive-kin interaction was replaced by political pathways of relating. The horizontal quality of relationships in the Jesus Messianist groups was not doubly institutionalized by the political institution; they remained fictive-kinship groups, labelled 'Hebrew Christians', the 'Church from Circumcision', and the like. On the other hand, Jesus Resurrectionism became Christendom in all its vertical glory. The change in institutional setting required new moral directives to cover political interactions among Roman Christians, now centred in Constantinople and integrated into the imperial system. These moral directives were developed from Roman law coupled with decisions taken by various imperially controlled church councils. Now, the political division

of the Roman empire was that of dioceses run by vicars of the emperor. The empire's political religion took on a similar structure. The metropolises of the empire had 'patriarchs' in positions of power. Christendom thus took on the structures of the political institution. All roles in the Christian community were 'politified'. Worship took the shape of the ritual of the imperial court; Christian buildings took the shape of imperial buildings (*basilica*). Political roles, obligations and expectations were now religious roles, obligations and expectations. Political roles such as king, lord, subject, warrior, counsellor, citizen; obligations such as civic duties, taxes, tithes, military service or *corvée*; and expectations such as covenant obligations, obedience, compliance, are employed as the terminology of religion. The main attributes of God are now political: power, might, 'God of the Heavenly Armies', and the like. Just as the metropolis or monarchic central place had a perpetual light (Hestia, Vestal Temple, perpetual Temple lamp) marking the life of the political religious body, so now major Christian basilicas burned a perpetual lamp. While central temple(s) and political life were always religious, these are now articulated in Christian terms.

DAILY LIFE

The daily life of Jesus group members was marked by similarities shared with other Mediterranean groups and distinctive differences as well. The similarities derived from common rhythms of Mediterranean living. Mediterraneans arose at sunrise and went to bed at sunset. The period of daylight was divided into 12 hours of greater or lesser length depending on the season of the year. Noon marked the division of this daytime period. As a rule all people, whether elites, freeborn, freed persons or slaves, arose at sunrise, washed quickly, prayed to the household gods, ate a simple breakfast and went to their occupations. Similarly, all ended their general workday at noon, marked by a brief repast. The type of morning activity that persons engaged in depended on their social rank. The same was true of the activity of the afternoon period. Elites and non-elite free and freed persons who could afford it followed the Hellenized Roman tradition of spending the period before supper at the baths. While provision shops were open, household slaves and lower ranking women would prepare supper. As a rule, no one 'worked' after noon, slaves included, unless they had to (e.g. pressed by the weather, forced labour, seasonal requirements, etc.; see Hacquard *et al.* 1952).

Differences in daily life patterns derived almost totally from social ranking. Each ranking, with appropriate entitlements and obligations, engaged in rather different activities. Not only were occupations rank-specific, so were the places where these occupations were pursued. Non-elites did not work for profit, to increase their wealth, to better their social position. In popular perception it was impossible to better one's social rank by one's own efforts. Society was characterized by kinship groups that produced and consumed at a subsistence level. Any surplus went to taxes for the elites – who likewise produced what they consumed at their several agricultural holdings. Increase in wealth came from the springtime occupation of warfare, long distance trading and, most commonly, extortion (e.g. taxation,

charging interest, profits on sales, foreclosures, tenancy rates, ransom). Stories told of rare and unexpected inheritance, something duly remarkable. Parents expected their children to provide for them in their old age, while they used their children to better their social position through marriage and at times by selling them into slavery. Children existed for the well-being of parents, not vice versa.

What was life like in an ancient Mediterranean city? One's perception of the city all depended on one's social rank (see Rohrbaugh 1991). Elites had country houses that were spacious, centrally heated, with a swimming bath, library, works of art, and the like. These houses were situated on grand agricultural estates worked by slaves. These elites would drive, ride or be carried in a litter to the city, where they had town houses near the centre of the city, in an area reserved for elite families, most often walled off from the rest of the city. On their way to the city, they would pass the tombs of the great along the highway nearer to the city, enter through the city gate, and have their entourage make its way through the teeming city streets. Upon approaching the elite quarter, the entourage would pass the city forum, splendid theatres, amphitheatres, public halls and baths and parks. Eventually elite personages would be welcomed by yet more of their attendants at the town house, an edifice almost as elegant as the country house, and largely supplied with foodstuffs by the country estate. There a swarm of clients, attended by household slaves, would be waiting to engage in another day's interaction with their noble patron. There were few, if any, Jesus group members who participated in the elite world except as slaves or freedmen of elites (e.g. in the household of Caesar).

The vast majority of city residents were non-elites: city-born plebeians, displaced peasants and a sprinkling of capable immigrants and freed persons. In Rome, for example, if one were a low ranking citizen, the day would start in a noisome tenement (see Figure 15.3). Small merchants and craftsmen would live in the same building as their business, in a guild or immigrant quarter. For all there would be no central heating; possibly a charcoal brazier (chimneys had not yet been invented). There would be no running water, no in-house toilet (slop was tossed from the window, for which glass panes had yet to be invented). An oil lamp would light the room, sparsely furnished for want of coins and for fear of 'wallbreakers' (as burglars were known).

Ordinary tenement dwellers rose at dawn, washed their hands and prayed to the gods of the household, then donned their dirty, louse-ridden outer clothing and checked for their amulet to ward off the evil eye. Going out was to plunge down as many as six flights of stairs into the teeming mass of humanity outside. A meal from a street vendor whose stall obstructed the press of human traffic in the street might follow, if there was time and money a wheaten cake or some fruit, maybe. Then a drink from a fountain (tea, coffee and chocolate were as yet unknown), or a visit to the public toilets, duly adorned with statues of protective deities. Then to the day's work. For small merchants and craftsmen, it was in the shop (see Figure 15.4). For day labourers it might be labour in a brick works, or running errands for some dignitary or other, if they were fortunate enough to have a job currently. Or for the unemployed, the work that morning might mean to search out a patron by visiting the homes of those of the great, whose arrogant slave flunkies might let one in.

To walk through the non-elite sections of the city required that one pushed



Figure 15.3 Commercial premises in Ostia. Photo Philip F. Esler.

through the throng, probably with running nose or hacking cough if it were winter, or feeling slightly feverish if it were summer. The noisome twisting streets between the tall tenements of the lower ranked plebeians would give way to broader streets flanked by the windowless exteriors of the one-storey houses of small merchants or the shop fronts of the two-storey houses of craftsmen, clustered in guild sectors. At times, non-elites might catch a glimpse of some of the elites' imposing and important public buildings, or even amble through a portico or two. But most people would not move out of their quarter of the city: their section of fellow ethnics and guild members residing in slums as well as adjacent good residential areas, at times with well-appointed public places. Yet to venture outside one's quarter or neighbourhood required vigilance, for cities were violent places, sprinkled with tough soldiers, sneaky cutpurses and other desperate, shameless men. The violence and cruelty that permeated Roman society were displayed in the amphitheatres of the empire. The sadistic enjoyment of the suffering, torment and death of animals and humans, redefined as sub-humans, served to parade the paramount position of power over every other value (see Carney 1975: 85–6).

Within this framework, Jesus groups members developed their own regimen within predominantly Judaeian neighbourhoods (hence the frequent conflict with Judaeans). For example, this is what an author such as Hippolytus (in the Judaeian quarter of Trastevere in Rome), suggests. Every believer, male and female, 'when they rise from sleep at dawn before they undertake any work wash their hands and pray to God, and so let them go to their work' (*Apostolic Tradition* 35.1; Dix 1968: 61). Yet even before work, if there is a teacher in town, believers are to stop in for



Figure 15.4 Insulae block in the markets of the Trajan complex in Rome. Photo J. C. N. Coulston.

instruction. Church teachers, like philosophers, had houses for the instruction of their clientele. If there were no instruction that day and if the believer were wealthy enough, ‘at home take a holy book and read a bit’ (35.2–3, 36.1; Dix 1968: 61–2). For as the *Didascalia Apostolorum* notes, there were those believers who ‘are rich and have no need of a craft for a living’; the author urges them

not to stray and go about vacantly; but be ever constant in drawing near to the faithful and to them that are like-minded with you, and be meditating and learning with them the living words . . . or sit at home and read the Law, and the Book of Kings and the Prophets, and the Gospel the fulfilment of these. But avoid all books of the heathen.

(Connolly [1929] 1969: 11–12)

Those not otherwise occupied were to stop to pray at mid-morning, and all were to pray at noon with the pause for the midday meal, probably bread baked at the large bakeries in the city (see Figure 15.5).

In the afternoon, wealthy believers might ‘rise up, go forth to the market-place and bathe in the bath of men: but not in the one of women’ (*Didascalia*, Connolly [1929] 1969: 14). Women, in turn, were not to bathe with men ‘when there is a women’s bath in the city or in the village’. But if there is no women’s bath, then the believing women go not at midday as the crowds gather, but at the tenth hour, when all go home to begin the supper period (*Didascalia*, Connolly [1929] 1969: 26).



Figure 15.5 Bakery and *molinium* at Pompeii. Photo J. C. N. Coulston.

Then at mid-afternoon those not otherwise occupied were to pray before supper, while all were to ‘pray also before your body rests upon your bed’ (*Apost. Trad.* 36:7; Dix 1968: 65; in these directives, prayer was always preceded by washing one’s hands). Finally ‘at midnight rise and wash your hands with water and pray; if you have a wife (who is a believer) pray both of you together’ (36.8; Dix 1968: 65). The city clock was the Roman changing of the guard (and rising at midnight to pray would not be difficult for people who went to bed at dusk).

Thus believers who had to work plied their trades, while the well-to-do engaged in patronage activities typical of the wealthy. There were teachers who had houses in which to instruct prospective believers, while it was perhaps in the bishop’s house that all met weekly and on appointed festive days to participate in a non-ethnic form of worship distinctive to Jesus groups. The shared story of what God did in Jesus held the group together in their belief that God sent Jesus

for our sake, that He might redeem us, who are of the People, from the bonds of the Second Legislation, of which we have already spoken, and might redeem you also, who are of the gentiles, from the worship of idols and from all ungodliness, and get you for an inheritance. If then He suffered thus for our sake, to redeem us who believe in Him, and was not ashamed, why do not we also imitate His sufferings, while He gives us endurance?

(*Didascalia*, Connolly [1929] 1969: 164)

‘Roman society demanded an uncomfortable mixture of pervasive deference to

superiors and openly aggressive brutishness to inferiors, not just slaves. It was a world of deference and condescension, of curt commands and pervasive threats' (Hopkins 1998: 210–11). While Jesus group members lived in a world that gloried in violent and cruel behaviour, they explicitly rejected violence and cruelty. Those who practised such behaviours were not acceptable as Jesus group members, for the larger society publicly embraced violence and cruelty because its deities were in fact demons. On the other hand, the reason why Israel adhered to violence and cruelty was that Israelites followed the Second Legislation that called for it. Finally, idolatry of any sort worshipped the demons that controlled Roman society, and thus grossly insulted the God revealed in Jesus. It was by their moral posture, their rejection of Mosaic 'Second Legislation' and their total and intolerant repudiation of idolatry that Jesus group members stood out in the Roman empire.

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SEX AND SEXUAL RENUNCIATION



Teresa M. Shaw

OVERVIEW

Recent scholarly assessments of sexuality, sexual relations, and sexual renunciation in early Christianity are part of a larger and very lively interdisciplinary discussion that is currently shaping research in classical studies, religion, anthropology, cultural studies, and other fields. The key methodological and topical questions in this discussion arise from contemporary scholarship in gender studies and the history of the body, as well as feminist, social, and critical theory. Broadly speaking, one could say that current research related to sexuality and focusing on ancient Christianity is characterized by an interest in both historical/social reconstructions as well as the examination of ideology and rhetoric, and how these relate to issues of authority and power. Christian argumentation and practices cannot be understood apart from the broader cultural contexts of the late ancient Mediterranean. It is not enough simply to summarize contemporary Jewish or pagan moral teaching as 'background' for Christianity. Rather, Christian texts, their authors, and their subjects embody and express cultural contexts and social expectations that are not limited to one religious tradition. Thus scholars are interested not only in explicating the overt theological argument or practical instructions of a text but also in accounting for the logic of its context in, for example, contemporary moral theory, medical models, systems of authority, and gender constructions.

In this chapter I will first highlight some of the theoretical and methodological concerns that have distinguished recent scholarly analyses, and then briefly describe current discussions of sexuality in late ancient medical theory and moral philosophy. Next I will turn to the textual evidence for late ancient Judaism and earliest Christianity in order to identify and characterize some of the ancient concerns related to sexual behaviour as well as some of the questions of modern research. The remainder of the chapter will trace aspects of early Christian discourses of sexuality to the beginning of the fifth century, focusing in particular on debates about perfectionism and rigorism, the goodness of creation and the ideal body as these relate to gender and sexual desire, the value and role of marriage, the construction and use of categories of gender deviance and conformity, and the developing ideology of virginity.

ISSUES OF THEORY AND METHOD

Much recent historical and critical analysis of issues relating to sexuality shares an important assumption with the broader study of the 'history of the body': that the human body, and therefore its behaviours and the disciplines applied to it, is inextricably part of culture and society. Susan Bordo has written:

Over the past hundred and fifty years, under the influence of a variety of cultural forces, the body has been forced to vacate its long-term residence on the nature side of the nature/culture duality and encouraged to take up residence, along with everything else that is human, within culture.

(Bordo 1993: 33)

This simple assertion has far reaching implications for the way one approaches historical and theological texts. If we accept that the body is not a thing with models and meanings that are both knowable and universally applicable, and if we assert that rather 'the body we experience and conceptualize is always *mediated* by constructs, associations, images of a cultural nature' (Bordo 1993: 35), then as historians we must avoid claims and pronouncements that remove bodily experience and behaviours from the web of culture, ideology, and social identity.

These considerations characterize contemporary scholarship on sexuality in various historical periods, including the late ancient Mediterranean and early Christianity. A study of sexual behaviour in antiquity would be suspect if it isolated the biological and physiological processes, the legal pronouncements concerning marriage and acceptable or forbidden sexual relationships, the social roles of male and female, or the ethical and theological discourses that claimed and prescribed morality. Even the reproductive processes and the biological aspects of sex – for example the biological differences between male and female – cannot be taken as fixed, neutral, or natural categories untouched by cultural factors. As much research on ancient medicine and in particular its representation of the female body has shown (Dean-Jones 1991, 1994; Gourevitch 1984; Hanson 1990, 1991; King 1997; Laqueur 1990; Rousselle 1983), the biological differences between male and female, even if recognized as somehow based in nature, are 'culturally mediated and historical', as biology itself is a 'socially mediated . . . classificatory system by which experiences are organized' (Turner 1984: 28). Thus sexuality is not simply a matter of bodily erotic expression and response; it is also 'inscribed on persons . . . by the exterior discourse of sexual ideology' (Turner 1984: 227; 1992: 41).

As others have noted, these assertions, and indeed the growth of body history as a distinct field, owe much to the influence of feminist analysis and criticism. In particular, twentieth-century feminists early on pointed out the relationship between the gendered body, dominance, and social power. They argued as well that cultural, political, and social forces were responsible for the sexual roles that are presented as 'natural' categories within dominant ideologies and institutions (Bordo 1993: 17; Stanton 1992b: 16; Richlin 1997: 18; Skinner 1997: 13). The insistence on the interrelationship of power, ideology, culture, and sexual roles is related to what has become since the 1970s a common terminological distinction between 'sex' and 'gender'. Stated simply, 'sex' refers to the biological or physiological

categories while 'gender' refers to the cultural or social categories by which 'maleness' and 'femaleness' are constructed and interpreted. The distinction between sex and gender is useful for thinking about the relationship between bodies and culture, and especially for calling into question the reductionist equation of biological sex with sexual roles and hierarchy as 'natural' facts. It makes the point that there is no sexual 'identity' constituted outside the realm of culture, social relations, power, and hierarchies. But many scholars have seen the inadequacy and limits of an analysis built on these two categories. For one thing, it leaves 'biology' as an unexamined or natural 'given', rather than itself a product of cultural and historical forces (Turner 1984: 28; Laqueur 1990: 11–13). Moreover, as Moira Gatens argues, the distinction between sex and gender allows the body to stand as a neutral category, thus masking the fundamentally 'sexed' status of the human body (Gatens 1996: 3–20). Finally, some theorists have noted a tendency for 'gender' to become a substitute for 'women' or 'female', thus perpetuating the categories feminists and other theorists seek to dismantle (e.g., Martin 1994: 104–10).

The writings of French philosopher Michel Foucault and others in his school have had a riveting and controversial impact on the study of sex and sexual renunciation in Late antiquity over the past 20 years. While Foucault's ethical theories and writing on the relationship between power, knowledge, and subjectivity were important enough, it is due to a seeming detour in his work that the spotlight shifted to ancient sexuality. As Foucault himself explains it, he realized after writing the first volume of his *History of Sexuality* in 1976 that in order to continue with his project of studying 'the modes according to which individuals are given to recognize themselves as sexual subjects', he needed to turn to the ancient western world, to the period between classical Greece and early Christianity, asking the question, 'how, why, and in what forms was sexuality constituted as a moral domain' (Foucault 1985: 5, 10)?

Let me describe briefly just three aspects of Foucault's influence, as well as some of the criticisms of his work, that have been particularly important among historians of antiquity. In doing so, I do not mean to suggest that Foucault is the only thinker fuelling scholarship and theory on ancient sexuality, but I hope to tease out several key topics in the current scholarly discussion while outlining Foucault's approach. First, Foucault provides a vocabulary for analysing ethics and the ethical discourse of ancient texts, especially as related to 'the care of the self' or ascetic techniques. Foucault distinguishes between four aspects of ethics: the ethical substance (what is worked on), the mode of subjection (what motivates people), asceticism ('the self-forming activity'), and the telos or goal (Foucault 1983: 238–9). Using this schema he argues for a dramatic difference between pagan and Christian ethics. Although Foucault died before publishing a substantial treatment of his thesis, he suggested the direction of his theory in different contexts. For instance, Foucault argued in *The Care of the Self* that in the pagan writers of the first two centuries CE (such as Musonius Rufus and Plutarch) one detects a greater problematization of sexual behaviour, a more negative judgement of pederasty and a higher valuation of the marriage relationship than in earlier Greek sources (Foucault 1986).

Beyond that, Foucault suggested that Christianity and the Christian moral code represented 'a profoundly altered ethics', with its emphasis on sex as evil and its

glorification of self-examination (the asceticism), obedience (the mode of subjection), and purity (the telos) gained through self-renunciation (Foucault 1986: 235–40; 1983: 241–3). The desire to identify neatly, to put a finger on what is different about Christianity, what separates Christian practice and thought from its pagan (or, we should add – as Foucault did not – Jewish) neighbours is not, of course, unique to Foucault. Especially in the area of sexual practice and sexual morality, the urge to set off Christianity has a long history, both among its apologists and its detractors, ancient and modern. Regarding Foucault, many scholars, even those acknowledging his influence, have found his pronouncements to be a little too neat. David Cohen and Richard Saller, for example, have shown that when Foucault identifies a difference between classical Greek and second-century Roman cultures on the value attached to marital union, he ignores the long history of both condemnation and valorization of marriage. They show that he misreads Musonius, Plutarch, and Pliny, whose praise of marriage and of wives leaves sexual hierarchy and traditional subjugation of women, even blatant misogyny, intact and operative (Cohen and Saller 1994: 36, 44–55). Others have argued for at least a modification of Foucault's assessment of the impact of Christianity, with consideration of other historical factors or texts (e.g. Brown 1990: 480; Clark 1988). While Foucault's terminology and his attention both to the problem of desire and the 'technologies of the self' in ancient philosophy and medicine have manifestly shaped the way scholars approach the topic of sex and sexual renunciation in antiquity, his historical method and conclusions have not gone without serious challenge.

This leads to a second area of discussion surrounding Foucault's work. As numerous critics have noted, Foucault gave almost no attention to the lives, desires, and ethical strategies of women in his *History*. Indeed, in a telling fashion Foucault identifies the four 'axes' of experience, in which the ethical subject is shaped, as: the relation to one's body, one's wife, boys, and truth (Foucault 1985: 32; 1986). Discussing this passage, Page duBois (who otherwise finds much to praise in Foucault's 'defamiliarizing' of the past) observes that Foucault's analysis of classical Greek culture 'takes for granted the subordination and subjection of women', and assumes 'that women, like boys, diet, and philosophy, were always merely occasions for the philosophical subject's mastery of himself' (duBois 1998: 86–7, 90). Amy Richlin states bluntly that the *History of Sexuality* 'presents us with a vision of ancient sexual systems that is even more male-centered than what his sources present' (Richlin 1998: 148; 1997: 25). Others have argued that Foucault's denial of women's subjectivity amounts to more than the kind of 'oversight' that is all too familiar in historical scholarship. Rather, his failure to consider gender relations in spite of his long interest in power and knowledge is not only an inexcusable and unredeemable flaw (Cohen and Saller 1994; Richlin 1998), it in fact exposes a fundamental problematic of his notion of power. Catharine MacKinnon writes, 'when he misses gender, he misses how power is organized sexually, hence socially' (MacKinnon 1992: 128).

Finally, Foucault's claim that 'sexuality' is a modern construct, a notion of a separate, knowable, and decipherable sexual identity that developed in discourses and institutions particular to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Foucault 1978), has generated both affirmation and critique (e.g. Halperin 1994; Halperin *et*



Figure 16.1 Mosaic dated *c.* 350 CE of two women in bikinis exercising, from a Roman villa in Piazza Armerina, Sicily. Copyright Roger-Viollet, Paris.

al. 1990a; Boyarin 1995a; Laqueur 1990; Richlin 1998; Broton 1996). The companion argument, developed particularly by David Halperin, is that the ancient Greeks had no 'sexuality' in the modern sense, so that the modern categories of heterosexual and homosexual are applied anachronistically to the ancient world, where social categories of active and passive were more important (Halperin 1994; Halperin *et al.* 1990b: 5). The far-reaching implication here, of course, is that categories of sexual identity are 'denaturalized', that the past is 'defamiliarized', and the present is 'demystified' (Stanton 1992b: 4; duBois 1998: 90; Larmour *et al.* 1998b: 13).

This is the language of a constructionist or historicist approach which looks to

differences, contingencies, change, and discontinuities in history and culture, emphasizing that sexuality, desire, even gender are the constructions of social, institutional, and cultural norms and discourses. Such a vision may free up the future by freeing the past (Halperin 1994: 34; duBois 1998: 96–102). In contrast, others have looked for continuities, shared experience, common identities. Thus MacKinnon and Richlin point to the historical stability of misogyny and sexual hierarchy, and Gatens notes that appeals to the ‘construction’ of gender and hierarchy ahistorically mask the ‘historical fact’ of the social hierarchy based on sex (MacKinnon 1992: 123; Richlin 1997: 26–33; Gatens 1996: 11). On the one hand these territorial claims and seemingly theoretical contrasts are important, even crucial, for careful analysis of the body in history. On the other hand, as many have noted, they create what may be artificial boundaries and scholarly impasses by seeming to force a choice between the old dualistic categories of culture and nature, social forces or biology (Turner 1992: 49, 61; Porter 1991: 220–1; Richlin 1993: 280–1; Boyarin 1994: 236–7).

These theoretical and methodological considerations have shaped current research on early Christianity in relation to the kinds of questions we ask, the vocabulary we use, and the way we negotiate texts and their representations, as will be evident in the remainder of this discussion. Thus important recent studies have tried to decipher the rhetoric surrounding, and evidence for, same-sex relationships (Brooten 1996; Boswell 1980; Boyarin 1995a; Hallett 1997; Satlow 1994) and the construction of masculinity and femininity (e.g., Gleason 1990, 1995; Laqueur 1990). Other scholars have shown how gender categories are used rhetorically to praise or condemn by associating an individual, regardless of his or her sex, with gender deviance, passivity, and hence femininity (Burrus 1991, 1995). Examinations of the problem of desire in Christian discourse (Miller 1993; Brakke 1995; Brown 1990), the role of body and theology (Bynum 1995; Shaw 1997; Clark 1986; Brown 1985, 1988), the historical reconstruction of female piety and the rhetoric of virginity (Shaw 1998; Clark 1981; Elm 1994; Cooper 1996; Cameron 1989), and the collection of texts and crosscultural analysis of bodily behaviours (Wimbush 1990; Wimbush and Valantasis 1995) have characterized contemporary scholarship.

SEXUALITY IN THE GRAECO-ROMAN WORLD

When we turn to the evidence from the Mediterranean world in the first and second centuries, the world in which Christianity developed and was to flourish, there are features of the social and cultural landscape that help to orient us to the assumptions, models, and concerns surrounding sexual behaviour and renunciation. Before focusing on Christian discussions it is important to consider, for example, the contemporary and influential philosophical instructions and musings as well as the physiological or medical constructs of the human body and sexual processes, both of which gave undeniable shape to Christian practice and discourse. Several recent studies have taken this approach (e.g. Rousselle 1983; Brown 1987, 1988; Foucault 1985, 1986; Martin 1995; Shaw 1998).¹ A fundamental characteristic of late ancient philosophy and medicine is the extent to which the two disciplines are intertwined

in their shared concerns with regimen, health, and happiness, as the second-century philosopher and moralist Plutarch observed (*Moralia* 122c–e). This intertwining of concerns points to what I and others have argued is a second fundamental characteristic; namely, that in spite of much dualistic language about soul and body and a tendency among modern interpreters to take dualistic thinking as a historical ‘given’, the relationship between body and soul in philosophy, medicine, and ascetic practice is complex and inextricably interdependent (Shaw 1998: 27–78; Martin 1995: 3–37; Brown 1988: 26–7; 222–40). For example, the prominent physician Galen (c. 129–200 CE), whose writings had lasting influence through late ancient, Byzantine, and Islamic medical traditions, wrote that the character of the soul is affected by diet, exercise, and habits, and the constitution of the body (which is dependent to some extent on regimen) leads to either intelligence or foolishness (*de sanitate tuenda* 1.8; *Quod animi* 4).

While the philosophical and medical literature of the period is by no means uniform, one can detect general or common themes and concerns related to both gender and sex roles as well as the nature and value of sexual relations. These are important in no small measure because they help to brighten the shadowy corners of the ‘logic’ of Christian teaching and debates. Although the current body of scholarship is large and varied, I will briefly summarize two issues: the medical representation of male and female bodies and its effect on gender differentiation, and the question of the benefits or dangers of sexual activity. As should be clear from the earlier discussion of some of the theoretical issues in the history of the body, medical representations and description cannot be taken at face value. Rather, medicine and medical models reflect cultural categories and social institutions. This is dramatically evident in the ways in which ancient medicine depicts male and female bodies. Recent studies have shown that ancient medicine, like any other part of ancient culture, is in the service of ideology (e.g., Lloyd 1964, 1983; Dean-Jones 1991; Hanson 1990). For example, one commonplace found in literature and philosophy as well as in medical discourse (particularly Galen) is that male bodies possess more innate heat than female bodies, heat and cold being two of the four basic qualities of bodies in the Galenic scheme, along with wetness and dryness. Of course heat is the superior quality and that which allows male bodies to develop to perfection, while the colder female body languishes in a kind of defective and inverted state, in incomplete imitation of the male.²

Thomas Laqueur has used this image to support his argument that ‘sex’ in antiquity was more a fluid continuum from feminine to masculine *genders* than the modern concept of two distinct and permanent biological *sexes*. Thus he argues that what mattered was gender roles and social hierarchies (Laqueur 1990). While Laqueur’s thesis may be rightly challenged as ‘reductionist’ (King 1997: 621; Richlin 1997: 29), his ‘one sex model’ does point to the sense of fluidity between masculine and feminine types that informs rhetoric and physiognomy, both of which regularly use classifications of masculine and feminine irrespective of the maleness or femaleness of their subject (Gleason 1990, 1995). Further, this sense of fluidity helps us to think about the Christian ascetic texts that urge the female to employ physical techniques such as fasting and modifying her appearance in order to become ‘manly’ or ‘male’ (Shaw 1997; 1998: 220–53). In any case, it should be clear

that the valuation of heat and cold, masculine and feminine, works to support gender hierarchy and the subordination of women.

Another feature of the medico-philosophical discourse on sexual relations is what scholars have identified as a kind of problematizing in terms of both desire itself as well as the effects of sexual activity on the body (e.g., Rousselle 1983; Foucault 1986; Brown 1988; Pinault 1992; Martin 1995). Thus too much sex or having sex when the condition of the body is not optimal can bring disease or exhaustion, and sex deprives the body of vital spirit or *pneuma*. On the other hand, intercourse is a remedy for some diseases or conditions, and most writers seem to assume that the healthy male or female will be sexually active.

There is evidence, however, of at least a debate on the value of sexual activity, and some have argued that these debates hint at growing pagan interest in the practice of sexual abstinence. Here the physician Soranus' *Gynaecology* provides important details. Although Soranus gives information and instructions concerning proper techniques for conception, healthful pregnancy and childbirth, and the care of infants – and thus writes to some extent in the service of standard sex roles (Rousselle 1983: 35) – he also argues that permanent virginity is a healthy state and that while menstruation and pregnancy are of course essential for conception and the continuation of generation, they are not in themselves healthy for the female body



Figure 16.2 Terracotta relief of a childbirth scene from Ostia, c. second century CE. Copyright German Archaeological Institute Rome.

(Soranus, *Gynaikeia* 1.27–32; 42). This position is in striking contrast to the previous tradition in Greek medicine, which assumed that the healthy woman was the sexually active and, perhaps more important, the procreative woman (Pinault 1992: 129; Gourevitch 1984: 96; Hanson 1990: 330–4). It is also significant that Soranus refers to a debate on the topic, and says that some argue that the body actually becomes ill through desire (1.30), and many understood the excretion of seed to be harmful to health. Further, although Soranus makes the case for the value of permanent virginity, he concedes that intercourse is necessary for procreation (1.32). Jody Rubin Pinault and Aline Rousselle have both observed that these passages in Soranus indicate the possibility that Roman pagans were practising sexual abstinence in this period, though Pinault doubts that it is likely that Roman girls were taking up lifelong virginity. Rousselle is more willing to draw out the connections between the pagan interest in semen retention and the health benefits of abstinence and the Christian praise of celibacy (Pinault 1992; Rousselle 1983: 95–102).

The medical debate on sexual activity and abstinence is connected to discussions in moral philosophy on the same topic. One of the best examples is found in Musonius Rufus (c. 30–c. 101 CE), who writes that excessive indulgence in sexual pleasures is shameful and shows a lack of the self-control so prized among Stoic philosophers (such as Musonius) and others. He argues that husbands as well as wives should practice intercourse only within marriage, and even then only for the purpose of procreation, not merely for pleasure (*Discourse* 12). Several recent studies have emphasized that in this period desire itself was problematized. While desire is a natural and physiological process which impels humans to procreate (e.g., Musonius, *Discourse* 14; Galen, *de usu partium* 14), it also threatens the human body and soul with weakness, distraction, and disease (Martin 1997; Rousselle 1983: 13–63; Foucault 1986: 104–44; Nussbaum 1994).

Not the smallest part of wantonness exists in the sexual pleasures, as those who are wanton need various little darlings, not only lawful ones but also unlawful, and not only female but also male – chasing one love or another, and not being satisfied with those who are available but aiming at those who are exotic, demanding shameful embraces – all of which is a great indictment against humans. Those who are not wanton or evil should consider sexual pleasures justified only within marriage and when accomplished for the purpose of procreation of children, because this is lawful. But mere pleasure hunting is unjust and unlawful, even if it is within marriage.

(Musonius Rufus, *Discourse* 12; trans. Teresa Shaw)

JEWISH AND NEW TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVES ON SEXUALITY

Jewish perspectives

Another important characteristic of the current research on sexual behaviour and ideology in the early Christian period is the consideration of Jewish teaching and practice, and especially the question of Jewish asceticism. Against those who would separate Jewish piety from 'asceticism', defined negatively as body-hating dualism, Steven Fraade has argued that an 'ascetic tension' exists within pre-rabbinic and rabbinic Judaism. This is exemplified in certain pseudepigraphal works, by Philo's advocacy of ascetic self-discipline and glowing descriptions of the ascetic Therapeutae community, by the evidence for the ascetic lifestyle and world-view of the Essenes, and the practice of Nazirite vows (Fraade 1986). Fraade advocates a broader and less pejorative approach to ascetic practices in Christianity, Judaism, and Hellenistic philosophy and religion, one that would recognize that all of these 'are interconnected and not simply isolated and heretical embarrassments' (Fraade 1986: 261). Regarding sexual asceticism specifically, Daniel Boyarin has made the case that, while many scholars including Peter Brown picture Judaism in the first century as affirming of sexual expression and pleasure within marriage, both Paul and Philo show vividly that in first-century Judaism 'sexuality had become . . . problematic'. He argues that Paul and Philo should be considered together as part of a 'pessimistic' strain within Hellenistic Judaism which in the second century the rabbis sought to control with a more optimistic affirmation of sexuality, procreation, and marriage (Boyarin 1992, 1995b). The implications of Fraade's and Boyarin's work for the study of early Christian ideas and practices is that they challenge long-held dichotomies between 'Christian' and 'Jewish', dichotomies that often are maintained on the basis of historical generalizations about whole groups. As Boyarin points out, it makes more sense to consider Paul and Philo together as representatives of 'Hellenistic Judaisms' than to divide them anachronistically as 'Christian' and 'Jewish' (Boyarin 1992: 28–9; 1994: 13–15). This is not to suggest that differences between religious traditions are unimportant either now or in the past. But differences *within* one tradition may point to broader cultural tensions and points of contact, as Fraade's and Boyarin's work has shown.

New Testament perspectives

These considerations are of crucial importance as scholars confront the New Testament writings, which on the topic of sex are filled with tension, ambivalence, and evidence of outright debate. Because the scholarly literature is so vast, I will highlight only some of the New Testament passages dealing with sexual issues and then discuss two studies that are representative of recent scholarship in the field. The words attributed to Jesus in the canonical gospels represent in general a relativizing of family relationships that seems to fit with Jesus' teachings on detachment from worldly concerns and possessions. Jesus calls for his followers to recognize that their discipleship will bring division within families, that they must not love their

parents, spouses, and children more than him (Matt. 10:35–7). Indeed, in the gospel of Luke Jesus' words are quite strong: 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14:26–7; see also Matt. 12:46–9; 19:16–30; Mark 3:31–5; 10:17–31; Luke 8:19–21; 11:27–8; 18:18–30). At the same time, he does not advocate the abolition of marriage but rather limits the grounds for legitimate divorce to *porneia* (fornication or sexual immorality) (Matt. 5:31–2; cf. Mark 10:10–12; Luke 16:18).

Besides the sayings in which Jesus seems to group familial relationships with wealth and material possessions as worldly distractions from discipleship, some sayings go further to suggest that freedom from marriage and sexual relationships either characterizes the kingdom of God or makes one ready for the kingdom. In Matt. 19:10–12, in response to the question of whether it is better not to marry in order to avoid the moral problems attached to divorce and remarriage, Jesus makes rather enigmatic reference to those who are able 'to receive this saying' because they 'have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven'. Even more dramatic are Jesus' words recorded in Luke 20:34–6: 'The children of this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are accounted worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection' (cf. Matt. 22:30; Mark 12:25). While these sayings may reflect a radically eschatological orientation, they became normative for the lifestyle of groups of Christians who sought to actualize or speed the coming of the kingdom by their own sexual abstinence. As we shall see, disagreement over the necessity of marriage or abstinence continued from the first century through the early Christian centuries.

This is clear in the authentic letters of Paul as well as the pseudo-Pauline writings. Chapter 7 of the first letter to the Corinthians preserves an extended and controversial discussion of sexual issues, and is a key text for considering both Paul's concerns and the issues confronting early Christian communities. In it Paul is responding to the sexual abstinence already being practised in the Corinthian community and to the anxieties raised over issues such as the marriage or celibacy of those struggling against youthful sexual desire, conjugal rights, and the possibility of divorce. Several of the verses continue to be the subject of debate (see the sources cited in Martin 1995: 209–28). Paul seems to agree with his correspondents in Corinth that 'it is good for a man not to touch a woman', but he cautions that because of *porneia*, that is, because of the temptations to sexual immorality, it is better to marry. Further, he argues that the husband and wife should not renounce sexual intercourse except if they agree to do so for a limited time devoted to prayer. Otherwise, sexual abstinence may lead to temptation. In the same way, Paul observes, it is good for those who are unmarried to remain so. Yet if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for 'it is better to marry than to burn [i.e. with desire]' (1 Cor. 7:8–9). Paul also urges that in consideration of the 'present distress' and the shortness of time, married persons should remain married and not seek divorce, while unmarried persons should remain unmarried. Although he insists that this is not a commandment and that to marry is not sinful, his own opinion is that the unmarried



Figure 16.3 Image of a Christian family group. Gold and glass inset on cross, fourth century CE. Copyright Museo della Città in Santa Giulia, Brescia.

state is better, more free from worldly anxieties (1 Cor. 7:10–40). While some have argued that Paul in these verses affirms marriage and marital sexual relations (see refs. in Martin 1995: 209), Paul only affirms marriage as a protection against lust and burning desire for those who lack self-control. In fact, Paul does not here or anywhere even praise procreation as good (Boyarin 1995b: 473). These observations not only locate Paul in relation to trends within the cultures of the Mediterranean which we have discussed in moral philosophy and Judaism, they also suggest the ways in which later advocates of sexual abstinence may readily have appealed to the words of Paul (Boyarin 1995b; cf. Brown 1988: 53–7).

If the sayings attributed to Jesus and the letters of Paul witness to their ambivalence or aversion to marriage and sexual relations, in the pseudo-Pauline letters written decades after Paul's death the institution of marriage seems securely in place. Thus the assumption is that bishops and deacons would be married (1 Tim. 3:1–13) and households stable and hierarchically ordered (Eph. 5:21–33; Col. 3:18–4:1; Titus 2:1–10). In contrast to Paul, the author of 1 Timothy insists that although women bear in some way the condemnation of Eve's deception and sin, they will be saved through the bearing of children (1 Tim. 2:11–14). Young widows should not remain single, as Paul may have preferred, but should remarry (1 Tim. 5:1–6). Moreover, the author warns against demon-inspired 'liars' who will come in the later

times commanding abstinence from certain foods and condemning marriage. In anticipated rebuttal to such deceivers, the author affirms that everything created by God is good (1 Tim. 4.1–4). These letters thus point not only to a ‘domestication’ of Pauline teaching, but more importantly to a contentious debate about the value of marriage, certain types of food, and material creation itself.

Two recently published studies may serve as examples of the ways in which scholars have elucidated elements of the New Testament literature concerning sexuality by considering the larger cultural context and ideology. Bernadette Brooten, in *Love Between Women*, sets Paul’s condemnation of female homoeroticism (Rom. 1:26–7) squarely in historical and cultural perspective first by elaborating the evidence for female same-sex relationships in antiquity using medical, astrological, and philosophical texts as well as erotic love spells and Jewish and Roman law. She argues not only that the ancients recognized female homoerotic relationships, but also (against Foucault’s and Halperin’s theses) that such relationships were categorized and medicalized as reflecting permanent sexual identities (Brooten 1996: 160–2). Moreover, Brooten writes convincingly against scholarly claims (e.g. Boswell 1980) that homosexual relationships in themselves were not condemned in the late ancient Roman world or in the Christian church (Brooten 1996: 11), demonstrating that the hostility to both female and male same-sex relationships was based on the pervasive and fundamentally gendered categories of active/passive and natural/unnatural. She thus demonstrates that when Paul categorizes sexual relations as either natural or unnatural he does so ‘based on the assumption widely shared within the Roman world that nature calls for men to be superordinate and active and for women to be subordinate and passive’ (Brooten 1996: 192).³

In his study *The Corinthian Body*, Dale Martin argues that within the Corinthian communal body we can detect two prominent ideologies of the the human body. One group (including Paul) saw the body primarily in terms of its vulnerability to pollution, penetration, and defilement; this group thus expressed fears about eating food offered to idols and having sexual relations with outsiders. The other group, which Martin identifies with ‘the Strong’, represents in general a higher social status and holds a fundamentally hierarchical understanding of the body, expressing less concern with issues of pollution. Martin elucidates the spectrum of meanings attached to ‘spirit’, ‘flesh’, and ‘body’, as he examines medical and philosophical literature concerning desire, sexual physiology, and diet in order to identify ancient constructions of the human body that lay behind community discord. He also makes good use of contemporary feminist and ideological criticism in his conclusions. Martin argues finally that Paul chooses to reinforce the social hierarchy between male and female rather than to call for the kinds of social restructuring he advocates elsewhere (Martin 1995: 198, 248). Paul’s conservatism rests in large part, Martin shows, on his conception of a fundamental difference between the ‘stuff’ of male and female bodies and his assumption not only that the male stuff was superior, but also that the female body was naturally more vulnerable to invasions and pollutions (thus explaining the arguments over veiling) (Martin 1995: 229–48).

Martin and Brooten exemplify the ways in which recent studies related to sexual behaviour and Christian identity in antiquity not only must take into account factors within the broader cultures and discourses that help explain

Christian formulations, but also use contemporary methodologies and are engaged in contemporary discussions of theoretical issues related to sexuality, gender constructions, hierarchy, and deviance. These studies are also important because in setting particular historical problems within their context, they avoid a simple teleological approach that employs aspects of pagan and Jewish culture and learning merely as the warm-up act or backdrop for Christian teaching and practice.

In the space remaining in this chapter, I would like to trace two broad features that distinguish the Christian discourse of sexuality in the literature from the second to the early fifth centuries. Both have already been mentioned in the previous discussion. First, there is constant tension between 'radical' Christian interpreters who understood sexual abstinence (along with other types of renunciation such as fasting) to be the distinguishing feature of the Christian life, or even a requirement for the kingdom, and those who sought to defend the institution of marriage and (controlled) sexual relations against their detractors. Second, by the fourth century an entire genre of literature and an accompanying theological framework grew up around the ideal of female virginity, as the practice of male and female monasticism became more institutionalized. In some ways the second feature represents an uneasy compromise to the first.

EARLY CHRISTIAN DISCOURSES OF SEXUALITY

Marriage or abstinence in early Christianity

The argument, recorded in 1 Timothy 4, over the value of marriage was not a localized or limited debate. While it is obvious that most Christians continued to marry and raise families, it is also clear that some smaller groups of Christians distinguished themselves by their dedication to abstinence or *enkrateia*. These various groups are thus commonly called 'encratites', although important distinctions in time, place, and teaching exist and need to be kept in mind (Brown 1988: 83–102; Chadwick 1960; Sfameni Gasparro 1991, and 1995: 129). In general, the basic features of encratite Christianity include a rejection of marriage (more specifically procreation) as well as meat and wine in the diet, justified by an eschatological and protological orientation that links procreation and meat-eating with the fall from paradise and with death, and thus links abstinence with a return to paradise and a regaining of the angelic condition of original creation. Scholars have noted that in this vision God as creator and indeed material creation itself are not evil. The dualistic aspect is not anthropological but eschatological (Van Eijk 1972: 212–19).

These general characteristics, then, appear in descriptions of Christian groups from the New Testament through the end of the late ancient period. In second- and third-century texts such as the *Acts of Thomas* and the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, for example, the links between sexual purity and the kingdom are striking. In the *Acts of Thomas* the apostle interrupts a newly married couple on their bridal bed and persuades them to 'abandon this filthy intercourse', to raise spiritual children rather than worldly offspring. Convinced, the young bride announces that she now sits unveiled and unashamed (as Eve stood naked and unashamed in the garden before

the fall). In a prayer that captures the ancient longing for the lost wholeness and shamelessness of first creation, the bridegroom declares his gratitude and hope 'that I may become again what I was' (11–15). Similarly, in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, the young Thecla rejects worldly marriage and faces the threat of execution after being converted by Paul, who preached 'Blessed are the bodies of virgins, for they shall be well pleasing to God, and shall not lose the reward of their purity' (*Acts of Paul and Thecla* 6). Paul's opponents criticize him for teaching that there is no resurrection unless one remains chaste and keeps the flesh pure (*Acts of Paul and Thecla* 12).

One of the reasons that the encratite position was so challenging is, of course, that it appealed to the ideals preached to all Christians: ideals of self-control, detachment from worldly pleasures and concerns, and dedication to the kingdom of God before any earthly commitment. These ideals, moreover, could be confidently argued from scripture (e.g. Luke 20:34–6; 1 Corinthians 7) (Sfameni Gasparro 1991, 1995; Boyarin 1995b) and were the basis for the apologists' presentation of the superior morality of Christians (e.g. Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1.15; 1.28). The perceived threat came not only from the radical interpreters of Christian *enkrateia*, but also from some gnostic, Marcionite, and Manichaean observers who presented a more formidable critique of material creation itself (Brown 1988: 87–121, 197–202; Van Eijk 1972: 217–19). Thus the writings of the most prominent authors in the early period, in their discussions relating to sexuality, exhibit a struggle to define the Christian life so as both to affirm marriage and creation and at the same time to praise sexual abstinence. They did so on the basis of two primary factors: the rhetorical distinction between marriage and virginity as 'the good' and 'the better' (Bailey 1959: 21–4) and the institutionalization and domestication of a Christian ascetic elite in the fourth century.

In the third book of his *Stromateis*, Clement of Alexandria (c. 160–c. 215) gives an early and lengthy defence of marriage against libertine and encratite detractors, in which he insists that the decision whether to marry or to remain in chastity must be a free choice. He claims that marriage is cooperation with creation and an opportunity for service, but notes that the purpose of marriage is procreation alone and that marriage still requires chastity and self-control. Nevertheless, Clement acknowledges that *enkrateia* is a powerful Christian ideal, not merely to struggle against desire, but 'not to experience desire at all', a gift that is attainable only by the grace of God (*Stromateis*, 3.57–8, 66–79).

Virginity and Paradise

Clement's relatively positive words concerning marriage are rarely matched in the fourth century, when the literature devoted to the praise and regulation of the disciplined ascetic life intensifies. Particularly in the many sources concerning female virginity,⁴ the authors seem to pay only lip service to the value of marriage, noting that while it is a good, virginity is better. In fact a standard topos in these texts is the 'woes of marriage', the dramatic detailing of all the physical and emotional hardships of a life with husband and children. Still, underlying the language of 'good' and 'better' is the same tension identified in the New Testament texts,

between ascetic rigorists and elite groups and the majority of married Christians, as well as the same questions concerning the goodness of creation and the value of procreation. The insistence on the goodness of marriage as a creation of God seems to have been a kind of litmus test for 'orthodoxy' in ascetic ideology, although some of the 'fathers' seem barely to have passed the test. Most notorious, perhaps, is Jerome (c. 342–420), whose meagre praise for marriage rested in the fact that marriage might produce more virgins (*Epistle* 22.20), and whose vehement rigorism in advocating sexual abstinence and fasting led to a very public and very nasty debate with the Roman monk Jovinian. Jovinian condemned Jerome's elitism as Manichaean and his hierarchical view of heavenly rewards as fundamentally against the gospel (Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*; Shaw 1998: 96–112, 234; Brown 1988: 366–86).

It is clear that at the end of the early Christian era many of the thorny issues surrounding sexuality, particularly those at the heart of the theology of creation and paradise, remained. Although the contours of what might be condemned as 'heretical' views are visible, and the ideology of virginity allowed for both the glorification of angelic purity and the confirmation of material creation and God's approval of marriage, nevertheless the difficult issues remain. In closing, we might consider two grand visions of creation, the fall, sexuality, and paradise, one Eastern and one Western, that offer 'uneasy' solutions to the problem of embodiment.

In the East, Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–94) understood virginity to be the first step on a freely chosen path from the corruption of the present life back towards the restoration of life in original creation: a genderless, passionless, marriageless and immortal state in the image of God. While marriage and procreation were good gifts of a compassionate God with the purpose of continuing the human race, the promise of virginity became evident with the coming of Christ.⁵

[Virginity] should be preferred by those who have intelligence, because it is stronger than the power of death. Bodily procreation – let no one be disgusted by this argument – is the origin not of life but of death for humans. For corruption has its beginning in birth, and those who have made an end of it (birth) have established in themselves through virginity the end point of death, by preventing it from advancing further through them. And, by setting themselves up as a boundary stone between death and life, they hinder its movement forward. If, then, death is unable to get past virginity, but reaches its end and dissolves in it, then it is clearly shown that virginity is stronger than death, and the body is rightly called incorruptible which is not working in the service of the life of corruption and which has not allowed itself to become an instrument of mortal succession. So in this the continuous sequence of corruption and dying is interrupted, which has existed in the interval from the first-formed human until the life of the one practising virginity [Christ].

(Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* 14.1; trans. Teresa Shaw)

In the West, Augustine (354–430), responding in part to Jerome's debates with Jovinian and to his own arguments with the Pelagians over free will and perfection-



Figure 16.4 Fresco of Adam and Eve from the Catacomb of St Peter and St Marcellinus in Rome, chamber 13, from the fourth century CE. Photo of the Pontifical Commission of Sacred Archaeology.

ism, praised the married life in strong terms as a sacramental bond while acknowledging the superiority of virginity. In the concept of ‘original sin’ as Augustine was to formulate it, the original creation consisted of male and female bodies that would have performed sexual intercourse but without any accompanying lust or compulsion. After sin and the fall, however, humans lost free will and the sexual act is unavoidably tainted with sinful concupiscence; moreover, sinfulness is passed from

generation to generation. Augustine nevertheless refused to condemn procreation, and argued instead that the married couple would be forgiven the lustful sin attached to legitimate marital intercourse.⁶

Gregory and Augustine offer windows into the drama of early Christian theology and ascetic identity. Their visions of human perfection and corruption likewise crystallize for ancient Christianity the issues that we as contemporary historians and readers continue to fret about: the place of the body in culture and society, sexuality and identity, male and female bodies, and the nature of gender itself.

NOTES

- 1 Others have examined astrological and 'magical' sources, as well as literary sources such as fiction or poetry, in order to draw out evidence for the cultural climate around sexual behaviour. See, for example, Brooten (1996) and Goldhill (1995).
- 2 The scholarship on this topic is substantial, and it should be noted that not all ancient writers agree on the relative heat of male and female bodies. See the discussion in Shaw (1998: 54, 64–8), Lloyd (1964) and Galen, *de usu partium* (14.6).
- 3 For related studies of ancient sexual types based on the distinction between active and passive, see Boyarin (1995a), Satlow (1994), Gleason (1990), Halperin (1994) and Foucault (1985, 1986).
- 4 For references and discussion, see Shaw (1997, 1998), Cooper (1996), Elm (1994), Brown (1985, 1988), Ruether (1974), Clark (1995), Van Eijk (1972) and Camelot (1952).
- 5 See the texts cited in Shaw (1998: 187–96).
- 6 See the texts conveniently connected in Clark (1996).

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WOMEN, WORSHIP AND MISSION

The church in the household



Gillian Cloke

[Christians] desire and are able to win only the simple, the lowly, the stupid; only slaves, women and little children . . . wherever one finds a company of fools, there will be the Christian teachers also, showing off their fine new philosophy . . . in private houses let them find children, let them get hold of gullible wives, and you will hear their farfetched notions.

(Celsus, in Origen, *Against Celsus* 3.59–62)

When the men are out of the house, they listen to your appeal for the only proper way and they come to the altars. But let a man get home, to the persuasions of his wife, the night and her tears, and they draw him away from the altars.

(Libanius, *Letter* 1411)

INTRODUCTION

The statements of the pagan philosophers above reflect what they perceived to be a factor in the spread of Christianity in their times. How true was this picture? The early Christian writers certainly seem to endorse this theory from a more positive viewpoint. From the first generations after Christ, we find Paul writing of many women, as 'of great help' (Rom. 16:2), 'hard-working' (Rom. 16:6, 12), 'contending at my side' (Phil. 4:3), Clement of Rome opining that 'females have frequently been ennobled by God's grace to achieve feats of heroism' (*First Epistle to the Corinthians* 55), Ignatius of Antioch expressing the view that his female followers showed 'faithful and loving steadfastness within the worldly and the spiritual life' (*Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* 11), and somewhat later Clement of Alexandria stating that 'both men and women practise the same sort of virtue' (*Paedagogus* [*The Educator*] 4.10). From all these writers, and others, there are many indications that the activities, influence and potentialities of women within the new faith were perceived in a positive light. But this was not a universal assessment: equally from earliest times are evident scolding voices asserting 'it was the woman who was deceived and broke God's law' (1 Tim. 2:14); and, quite quickly in this era, these judgements on

women's capacities have become a shrill, restrictive, self-enforcing stream of criticism: '[woman,] you are the devil's gateway . . . you have been made the sword that destroys' (Tertullian, *On Women's Dress* [*De cultu feminarum*] 2.2); 'the female sex is weak and vain' (John Chrysostom, *On the Epistle to the Ephesians* PG 42.148); 'by a woman, care entered the world' (Ambrose, *Letter* 42.3); 'it is woman who hunts for the precious souls of men' (Epiphanius, *Panarion* [*Medicine Box*] 79.8). Can we trace the history of the development in these contemporary attitudes to women in the early Christian centuries?

For it was from the earliest said of Christianity – usually as a canard – that women were instrumental in its spread, along with other elements of the population unworthy of consideration. One of the earliest accusations hurled at Christianity is of its appeal to the servile, the alien, the disenfranchised classes; hence Celsus' second-century gibe, that Christians could only win the stupid, the lowly, the marginalized – 'slaves, women and little children' (Celsus in Origen's *Against Celsus* 3.59). That this was an accusation at once common and stinging can be seen in Justin Martyr's pupil Tatian, who certainly felt the need to defend the movement against this kind of criticism; attempting simultaneously to throw the charge back on the accusers and defend what was evidently a true state of affairs, he countered the objections of philosophers such as Celsus: 'You who are known as followers of women yourselves, shame on you for scoffing at the women who join us – and at us for standing by them' (*Oration to the Greeks* 34). Though this was in the nature of a hostile accusation at the time, the idea has been taken up with a degree of enthusiasm by more recent writers with the alternative agenda of establishing the very thing that early Christian writers spent so much energy denying – the dynamic presence of women in the early church. There are obvious dangers attendant on being hijacked by an agenda, whether from our own or ancient times; and then as now, the presence and activities of women in the churches tended to attract great attention and intensity of feeling, as we shall see.

To those studying the effect of women on the early church more recently, however, some conclusions are regarded as self-evident. From a modern sociological perspective, it is evident that 'various factors . . . clearly indicate to most historians that many more females than males were converting to Christianity in its first centuries' (Shaw 1993: 3–45). Moreover, since 'the prominence of women in the spread of Christianity in the earliest period has long been a commonplace', there is an evident necessity of stressing 'Christianity's appeal to women as an important factor in its success' (Cameron 1980: 60). It is today axiomatic, in fact, that in the first Christian centuries the new belief system used women and their position in the family/household environment to transmit and reproduce itself.¹ We shall explore briefly how this might have happened: what the positive aspects to such a process were, what its pitfalls were; what the nature of female experience of Christianity was, whether there was a role for female service in church thinking; in short, whether the recent search for a 'lost Eden of early Christianity in which women were both active and prominent' (Cameron 1994: 152) can bear fruit. There are obvious difficulties in considering the areas addressed: finding out about the mission of women given the reluctance of the male authors to report it; investigating the reticent area of the 'household' to try to establish what is going on in 'everyday activities'; considering

these areas also in the light of the evidence of women who were notable, often simply for the fact of being reported on and thus visible to our examination – thereby excepting themselves from the common run. Amid a diversity of female experiences and settings, and the paucity of their coverage at the time, what sort of ‘everyday experience’ for women in Christianity at this period can we recover?

WOMEN IN THE EARLIEST CHURCH: THE ‘JESUS MOVEMENT’ AND THE PAULINE CHURCH

The movement that would become known as Christian seems from its inception to have taken an attitude of interest in the potentialities of women at the prompting of its originator, who is shown in all the gospels interacting with women: talking to women; healing them; accepting unaccompanied female followers; consorting with alien, ritually unclean and untouchable women, impoverished widows, prostitutes and those of dubious lifestyle generally; engaging with all of them and listening to their perspective.²

Of particular interest are the occasions when Jesus is depicted using their unorthodox or marginalized viewpoints for teaching material: for instance, debating with a non-Jewish woman (variously described as Canaanite [Matt. 15:21–8] or Syro-Phoenician Greek [Mark 7:26]) about the legitimacy of his ministering to gentiles; and revealing the truth of his nature and calling to the woman of Samaria (John 4:1–42), a scene which was depicted on the walls of the catacombs in Rome (see Figure 17.1). These women being doubly disqualified according to contemporary Judaism, both as women and as ethnic outsiders, it is difficult to escape the conclusion they were used as an example to the inclusive, male Israelite followers of Jesus. This is particularly true of the woman of Samaria, who represents the ultimate outsider – an unaccompanied female non-Jew living with a man to whom she was not married – an exchange with whom Jesus actively seemed to seek out, leaving the disciples ‘surprised to find him talking with a woman’.³ But these women are demonstrated engaging with Jesus in dialogue that reveals their responsiveness to religious nuance, and then as being in a position to benefit from his revelation to them, and even to become an aid to evangelism: ‘many of the Samaritans in that town came to believe in Jesus because of the word of the woman’ (John: 4:39). Jesus can further be seen pointing out astringently that prostitutes in his view showed a greater potentiality for salvation than the priestly authorities since their abject status made them less prone to self-righteousness (Matt. 21:31–2). He says of the ‘woman of a sinful life’ that ‘her many sins have been forgiven, for she loved much, while he who is forgiven little, loves little’ (Luke 7:47), thereby potentially appealing to a new religious ethos, one that is passive, penitential and particularly ‘feminine’ in form.

This interest in women can be taken as further proof of Jesus’ seeming mission to the outcast in Jewish society, as evidenced by his willing contact with fringe elements such as despised alien groups and Roman agents. The testimony of rabbinical sources – indicating that women were regarded as to a degree unteachable and to be excluded from participation in religious debate – suggests that in this also Jesus may



Figure 17.1 Fresco from the Catacomb of Callistus in Rome of Jesus and the Samaritan woman, from the latter half of the second century CE. Photo from Wilpert (1903: plate 29B).

have been regarded as revolutionary and that such a stance will have contributed towards his final break with Pharisaic orthodoxy (Frend 1984: 67). Non-rabbinical evidence, however, suggests a higher degree of practical participation of women in Jewish religious life than the scriptural/writing stance would seem to allow for (Kraemer 1992: 106–23; Sawyer 1996: 73–90; Brooten 1982: 77–95). If so, in this aspect Christianity followed the example of Judaism in becoming a religion in which women were formally excluded in thinking and literature while highly active in practice.

The women repaid Jesus' interest: we are invited to believe from the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke that from the earliest days of his teaching until the last days at Jerusalem, Jesus was followed by numbers of women who 'ministered' to him and the disciples (Matt. 27:55; Mark 15:41; Luke 8:1–4). This continued to the bitter end: Matthew offers testimony that in the final hours of Jesus' life, after his male disciples had 'deserted him and fled' (26:56), still a band of women who had followed him devotedly from Galilee kept faith till the bitter end, 'watching from a distance' (27:55). Luke is most explicit, in saying that when Jesus in the early days of his ministry travelled round preaching, besides the disciples he was accompanied by 'a number of women who had been healed of evil spirits and diseases: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had been driven out,

Joanna, the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household, and Susanna, and many others. These women used their own resources to provide for [Jesus and his disciples]' (Luke 8:1-4). Only Luke names them and offers their origins; this, taken with the evidence of the Acts of the Apostles by the same author, which also offers many examples of female converts, sometimes described as 'leading' or 'prominent' in their localities (Acts 17.4, 12), has led to speculation that this author had a particular interest in so doing. Possibly writing in the second century, when the kind of criticism shown at the head of the chapter was developing into a sustained campaign, the author of Luke-Acts was perhaps concerned to show that Christianity attracted women, and not necessarily just those who were foolish, fallen or servile, but women of 'the right kind' – respectable, educated, prosperous (Kraemer 1992: 129–30; D'Angelo 1990: 441–61). The positing of a possible agenda for the portrayal of women in Luke-Acts, if true, does not disqualify its testimony when it says that not just women, but women of means, were quick to adopt and support the new belief. In this it not only fits with earlier practice in both pagan and Israelite religious experience, but displays tendencies which were to become evident as one typical layer of female activity in the spread of Christianity: that there were women present throughout who, on taking up a religion, might not only believe but also bankroll – first endorsing theoretically and then supporting materially the movement they chose to join. With regard to the stinging proposition of the pagan philosopher Celsus and others, that Christianity had most appeal and quickest transmission through the lower or servile classes, when looking at women converts, this was demonstrably not necessarily so.

When the author of Acts claims 'a good many influential women' were amongst Paul's first converts (Acts 18:4), an example who may be typical of these is Lydia. The first Christian foothold in Europe, at least in the Lucan perspective, was established by the apostle Paul in Philippi, and his first convert there – the first attested convert to Christianity in the western empire – was a woman, and a woman of some means: Lydia, who was a merchant in purple-dyed cloth – a luxury trade in ancient times. On first arriving in Philippi, Paul and his followers Silas and Timothy went outside the city gate by the riverside 'expecting to find a place of prayer'; finding it they sat down 'to talk to the women who had gathered there'.

One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira; a God-fearing woman. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. She was baptised, and her household with her, and then she said to us 'If you consider me to be a believer in the Lord, come and stay in my house.' And she insisted on our going.

(Acts 16:13–15)

Lydia, in this formative encounter, displays characteristics that hark back to the women around Jesus – unaccompanied, an emigrant, but 'God-fearing'. She also demonstrates traits that will prove typical of the women who influenced the church of antiquity, discernible from the first to the fourth century; of the self-confident, well-to-do woman who enters into a forthright dialogue with a new teacher, listens intelligently to the message, converts, brings those of her household circle along with her (their opinions on this are rarely offered) – then follows up her change of

belief with hard cash and starts influencing decisions. It was Lydia who subsequently conducted the embryonic church at Philippi from her house: when Paul and Silas were released from a spell in prison later on, 'they went to Lydia's house where they met with the brothers and sisters' (Acts 16:40) before departing Philippi.

Nor is Lydia an isolated example of a female presence in the forefront. In Athens, of 'the few' that believed Paul and subsequently set up the church there, the only two converts named are Dionysius the Areopagite and 'a woman named Damaris'. In Corinth, Paul's leading followers and proponents were an emigrant Roman-Jewish couple, Priscilla and Aquila. It has not been lost on reconstructionists of the female mission that in every subsequent mention of them and the church they established in Paul's letters, her name is given precedence over his.⁴ Priscilla (or Prisca) is also shown as instructing a later convert, a 'learned man' Apollos (who himself went on to become a vigorous advocate for the faith); she and Aquila 'explained to him the way of God more adequately' (Acts 18:26), seemingly on a parity. And so the list goes on: Mary in Jerusalem, Phoebe of Cenchrae, Chloe of Corinth and Nympha of Laodicea had churches meeting in their houses (Acts 12:12; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 11; Col. 4:15), Euodia and Syntyche 'contended at my side in the cause of the Gospel' and Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis 'laboured in the Lord' (Phil. 4:2-3; Rom. 16:6, 12); this besides all the female adherents who are merely mentioned in passing: Julia, Apphia, Rufus' mother, Nereus' sister, the 'chosen lady' to whom the apostle John deferentially addressed a letter.⁵ There may even be a female deemed to be 'outstanding among the apostles' following the conjecture that the second name in Romans 16:7 should be read as 'Junia' rather than the male Junias.⁶

What is already evident is that women of the comfortably off and merchant classes of the empire were well-attested in the Christian movement from early on in its spread; that while it is indubitably true that the new cult was quickly established within servile ranks,⁷ it also had substantial purchase amongst the classes of those capable of being patronesses to the apostles and their successors.⁸ Lydia was a prosperous merchant, and the church at Philippi prospered not merely spiritually: it will probably not be a coincidence that a church initiated by an established merchant maintained itself in sufficient financial heart to offer material support to Paul's mission work on several occasions, as he gratefully acknowledged. 'In the early days of my mission, when I set out from Macedonia, you alone of all our congregations were my partners in payments and receipts . . . you contributed to my needs, not once but again and again when I was in need . . . now again I have received from Epaphroditus what you sent' (Phil. 4:15, 18). Priscilla and Aquila were together in trade as tent manufacturers; their church at Corinth was well-to-do enough to send subventions to poorer churches in Judaea (1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 9:1-3). Mary, Phoebe, Chloe and Nympha (referred to above) evidently possessed houses large enough to accommodate church meetings.

In areas beyond the apostles' home-ground, there is even some indication of the early presence in the new cult of members emanating from genuine upper-class echelons. There is an incident in Tacitus emanating from around the time of the Epistle to the Romans: recording that 'a lady of high family', Pomponia Graecina, was 'arraigned for alien superstition' (Tacitus, *Annals* 13.32) — the subsequent

discovery of an inscription bearing the name Pomponius Graecinus in the oldest part of the catacomb of Callistus⁹ is strongly suggestive that this 'superstition' was that of following Christ. Left to the old-style jurisdiction of her family, in a trial presided over by her husband, Aulus Plautius, she was, however, found not guilty of the resulting charge of 'immorality'. But her story has an interesting conclusion. Tacitus describes her as 'destined to a long life and continuous grief', for subsequent to this trying period she 'survived for forty years, dressed in perpetual mourning and lost in perpetual sorrow', an eccentricity for which she became renowned. Tacitus attributes this demeanour to the tragic loss of family members; but if we could be certain of her Christianity it is intriguing to think that, worlds away from Paul's provincial professional women, she might be a precursor of the Roman ladies of later centuries who ran mad after the writings of St Antony Abbot and Jerome and, turning their houses into retreat-centres, adopted what would be known as an ascetic/monastic lifestyle – one that sounds not unlike Pomponia's.

Then too in 96 CE, the emperor Domitian had a purge of nobles for a crime that may well have been Christianity; this included banishing Flavia Domitilla, a lady of consular family and his own relative, to an island.¹⁰ The law, in fact, may be found providing for preferential treatment for Christians of rank, stating that 'of those who disturb new religions with unknown customs or methods by which the minds of the people could be disturbed, those of the upper classes shall be deported and those of the lower classes shall be put to death' (Julius Paulus, *Collected Sentences* 5.21); Roman law was generally more lenient of elite malefactors than non-elite ones, whether Christian or not.

WOMEN'S ACTIVITIES: LEGITIMATE MODELS

The activities of these women in the earlier church seem to say more about their origins and social status than their inspirational or spirit-driven ministry, or their new Christian status. Their mission arises from and reverts to the sphere seen as 'proper' to women: the fittest way for a devout woman to transmit her belief was from within the women's quarters. Lydia, Priscilla, Chloe and Nympha, already mentioned, are all mentioned in association with the households, as are most of the women Paul names in connection with missionary work. In the next generation after Paul, Ignatius of Antioch in addressing the Smyrnaeans' congregation gives prominence to 'Tavia and her household'; and 'the household of the Procurator's lady' (*Polycarp* 8). In the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, the Antiochean noblewoman Tryphaena is shown being converted by Thecla 'and her household with her' – and though not balking at having the improbably dynamic Thecla baptise herself and tell Paul what to do, the author is still careful to indicate that Thecla's tuition and conversion is of 'the female servants' of the household.

Thus when Phoebe is 'a servant (*diakonos*) of the Church at Cenchrae . . . a helper (*prostatis*) both to myself and to many others' (Rom. 16:1), and Euodia and Syntyche 'contend . . . in the cause of the gospel' (Phil. 4:3), still 'in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak and must be in submission' (1 Cor. 14:34), and many subsequent expounders

of these apostolic texts are to be found explaining that such 'help' should be within certain circumscribed grounds; the evangelism, instruction and preparation for baptism of women only and within private houses only – so that 'by their agency the teaching of the Lord could reach the women's quarters without arousing suspicion' (Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 3.6.53). A second-century model for serious and dedicated women offered by Tertullian suggested attendance at nocturnal church meetings and all-night vigils at special feasts, visiting the poor, succouring those in prison (particularly confessors and martyrs-to-be), foot-washing, and offering hospitality to strangers.¹¹ Women's gender was held to make them especially suitable for the service aspects of church life: caring for the poor, the sick and other women. Consecrated widows, deaconesses and 'respectable' women had such functions of 'ministering' in the church from the earliest times, and in a limited capacity were entrusted with transmitting the 'good news', preferably within the confines of the *oikos*, the home or household. The positive aspect to this is that the household environment may be seen as the logical course of least resistance for the early transmission of a revealed apocalyptic knowledge of dubious origin. Paul might stand up in the synagogues and market-places in Athens and Rome and practise his missionary dialectic with mixed success, provoking largely argument amongst the assembled men, whereas a low-key chat with women at a well before they went quietly back to the family enclosure might not have appeared as dynamic. Yet such cases could demonstrably provide converts, a church and a foothold.

It is also difficult to know in this age how far a 'mission within the household' transformed itself into an active ministry. In an age where believers customarily met within each other's houses, however, this may not have been quite as restrictive as it sounds. While at this early stage of the development of the church we cannot read a precise ministerial function into the work of women, they indisputably participated actively in the work of evangelism alongside the men. Further, we have already seen that Priscilla was accorded the respectful notice of the writer of Luke-Acts for instructing 'the learned' Apollos in the Christian faith 'more adequately' with Aquila. While such instruction indeed took place within their home, improving the spiritual education of a man already known for his preaching is in no sense the petticoat mission to the women's quarters that Clement seems to envisage. In this connection it may indeed be significant that Paul always pays Priscilla and Aquila tributes, that they 'work' and 'risk their lives' and greet fellow believers in the name of the Lord very much as a duo, with Priscilla taking top billing. If she were not the active half of the partnership, given Paul's reservations concerning women's work, it would surely have been the other way about. Further, when the church met in her house, and at Nympha's, Lydia's, Mary's and Phoebe's houses, what then becomes of a mission within the household? There are no suggestions that this was a church entirely of women: should we assume Priscilla and company evangelized only the women in it? This is where speculation really takes over, since we lack detailed witness as to what went on in such household environments. The difficulty from our point of view is knowing really how any of the 'contending in the gospel' that the women evidently did was carried out, when this particular mission activity by its very nature ideally disappears from sight. Such a ministry is



Figure 17.2 Fresco from the Catacomb of Priscilla illustrating the marriage of a bride and groom by a bishop. Photo from Wilpert (1903: plate 79).

most evidently going aright when there is nothing distinguishable about it. But a congregation meeting under such circumstances could to a degree follow its own inclinations, with a reasonable amount of local variance. It is reasonable to speculate that in the absence of a charismatic apostle, believers with a gift of tongues, or prophecy, or inspirational prayer-leading, might find their standing taken for granted within the local community for these gifts regardless of gender. The lines between ‘teaching’ and ‘praying’, and also ‘prophesying’ and ‘inspirational leadership’, we may posit, were correspondingly blurred in the earliest era. This would account for the amount of evident regard offered to numbers of women by the apostolic writers, irrespective of their evident reservations concerning the ‘ministry’ of women.¹²

For one other form of potentially inspirational leadership of a congregation is also visibly open to women in the early churches – for instance in Paul’s own favoured Corinthian church, in that there were women, as men, who were seized by the spirit, who prophesied and led in prayer. This was evidently a model familiar to the early church as an acknowledged function of mission and service to the community, and with the acceptance that the spirit inspired whom it would, women might also be expected to fulfil this mission: for along with ‘every man who prays or who prophesies’ we find Paul referring to ‘every woman who prays or prophesies’ (1 Cor. 11). The Gospel of Luke offered the example of the aged prophetess Anna, who prophesied about the infant Jesus in the Temple; at Caesarea the four daughters of Philip the Evangelist were acknowledged leaders in this area; and the church at Lydia’s home town of Thyatira evidently possessed an influential prophetess.¹³ In the Coptic version of the *Acts of Paul* two female prophets are mentioned. Origen’s judgement was: ‘such a grace is decided by purity of mind alone, not by the matter of gender’ (*Homily 5.2 on Judges 11*).¹⁴ Even the resolutely anti-female voice of Tertullian can be found acknowledging ‘a sister among us whose lot it has been to be favoured with gifts of revelation’ – taking care however to add that she never failed to submit her visions to the careful scrutiny of the church authorities, ‘so that their truth may be probed’ (*De anima* [*On the Soul*] 9). Such a calling, in fact, might not be a comfortable experience: the Montanist Maximilla, regarded as being rather too accomplished in this and subsequently dubbed a heretic, reported that ‘whether or not I want to, I am compelled to receive the message of God’ (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 48.12.13).

This function continued after the apostolic period – after it had begun to attract unfavourable notice from church writers – as an inspirational aspect in the persecuted church. Still more legitimately, as a confessor or martyr-to-be, one might receive visions – and use the authority this conveyed to instruct one’s fellow-believers. Women were not backward in this respect: alongside reportage of men like Polycarp, Attalus, and Saturus we have such examples as Agathonice, Thecla and Perpetua.¹⁵ In the Greek recension of the story of Agathonice, one of the earliest women to be accorded status as a martyr, she was presented with a vision of ‘the glory of the Lord’ while only a bystander at the trial of Carpus and Papyrus as Christians. Impulsively calling out, ‘Here is a meal that has been prepared for me. I must partake and eat of this glorious repast!’, she was hauled off to join them in their martyrdom (Musurillo 1972: 29). Thecla on her way to the stake, looking around keenly for Paul who had converted her, saw instead the form of Christ disappearing into the heavens. From then on she is portrayed as receiving God’s orders and revelation directly without the need of intermediaries. Perpetua’s visions while awaiting trial and execution as a Christian evidently arose out of gifts already known by her community: her brother requested that she ask for a vision because she stood in ‘high dignity’; she agreed because ‘I knew that I could speak with the Lord, whose great blessings I had already experienced’ (*Perpetua and Felicitas* 7), and had no difficulty in complying. This and her subsequent visions while imprisoned as a Christian – including the reception of herself and her companions into the next life, and of contending in the amphitheatre in the appearance of a man – were received by her colleagues as the direct revelation of God and she as fitting to have them and to

interpret them.¹⁶ Her authority in this respect is not questioned, and, irrespective of the opinions of her contemporary, countryman and co-religionist Tertullian (who may also be the editor of the *Passio* – see Robert 1982 and Shaw 1993: 30), she saw no need to seek the legitimating or interpretation of a male cleric to justify her revelatory experiences and their transmission to her colleagues. Occasionally, too, women offered the inspiration for the visions of others, even assisting with their salvation. Thus Potamiaena, a martyr much-revered in Alexandria, appeared after her death in a vision to the repentant soldier who had been put in charge of her execution, assuring him that she ‘has obtained her prayer for the Lord on his account and before long will take him with her’. He duly became a Christian after her example and was himself martyred (Eusebius, *HE* 6.5).

ILLEGITIMATE AND ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES

Though Paul acknowledged and seemed to legitimate prophetic female ministry, in fact there are indications that he was less than happy with it in practice. While the established custom was to let women prophesy, and Paul acknowledged that if the prophetic spirit should seize a woman no one was empowered to silence her, or rather the spirit speaking through her, he tied this licence to prohibitions requiring that a woman prophet veil herself as a requirement of Christian custom (1 Cor. 11:3–16): ‘every woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonours her head’. He then directly followed this with some rather more vehement statements which may represent his more innate belief,¹⁷ to the effect that a woman should maintain complete silence in the church gathering and ask her husband if she wished to know anything (1 Cor. 14:33–5).

This is an early indication of the tension aroused by the female Christian mission. Paul at the outset was happy to use the resources, houses and energy of women, and praised their missionary endeavours, but still had obvious reservations about their possible encroachment; reservations enthusiastically magnified and endorsed by later interpreters, struggling against problematic females in their own day. Taking the more prohibitive pronouncements and the skimpy evidence into account, then, one must conclude that women’s missionary activity should not be mistaken for authority: as far as it went, it merely answered an early practical need. Further, even from such scant evidence as this, we quickly find later patristic authors trying to suppress attempts to rationalize a place for female ministry. Clement of Alexandria stresses that women should content themselves with the mission to the women’s quarters; Tertullian pours scorn on those using the myths around Thecla in an attempt to justify women having the effrontery to teach and baptise; and after a rash of cults aggrandizing the example of Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of God, or the scriptural place of female prophecy as a justification for female *auctoritas*, Epiphanius may be found stating the patristic stance in round terms:

God choosing to emanate from a holy virgin did not happen so that women should be appointed priests after some generations. God did not wish that for

Salome, and even for Mary herself: he did not permit her to baptise or bless the disciples. He did not give her the authority over the earth, but called her merely to be holy and to be worthy of his kingdom. Not to the woman called the mother of Rufus, not to those who followed him from Galilee, nor to Martha or Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, nor to any of the holy women who provided for him out of their own resources, nor to the Canaanite woman, nor to the woman with the haemorrhage, even though he called her saved – not to any woman on earth did he give the privilege of performing such functions.

(*Panarion* 79.7)

For the example of the prominent and highly regarded women in the apostolic church, though lacking in detail, was plain to immediately succeeding Christian communities. Moreover, the fluid nature of the arrangements surrounding this female presence would result in inevitable tensions in the next few generations. In an era of consolidation, women attempted to build on the models approved in the New Testament, such as the precedents of Lydia, Priscilla and the prophetess daughters of Philip, which seemed to endorse pious activities such as ‘owning’ a church, influencing churchmen or pursuing a ministry of prophecy. Thus the heretical Marcionite church of the second century could lay claim to being the successor of the Pauline communities, although it afforded prominent roles to women: Tertullian reported of Marcionite women that ‘they even dare to give the church’s teaching, engage in debates, practise exorcism, offer healing – perhaps even to baptise’ (*De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 41.5).

For the problem in women supporting or setting up a church, or prophesying, was that women could get it wrong – and, on the other hand, having a woman as a leading activist could in itself be a sign of something wrong with a congregation. Epiphanius said plainly, ‘it is woman who hunts for the precious souls of men . . . Do not believe a vulgar woman: for every heresy is a vulgar woman’ (*Panarion* 79.8). The heresiologists are full of instances. The prophetess at Thyatira referred to as ‘Jezebel’ evidently had sufficient sway to ‘mislead’ the faithful morally and doctrinally (Rev. 2:20). Apelles (precursor of Marcion) fell into his error because of ‘the responsive oracular answers of a certain virgin under demoniacal influence, whose name was Philumena’ (Eusebius, *HE* 5.13). ‘It was with the help of the whore Helena that Simon Magus founded his sect; troops of women accompanied Nicholas of Antioch, that inventor of pollutions . . . Arius . . . commenced by deceiving the emperor’s sister; . . . Lucilla’s resources helped Donatus pervert many people’ (Jerome, *Letter* 133.4). The last-named Lucilla, a Spanish noblewoman residing in third-century Carthage, described by an opponent as ‘a powerful and factious woman’, was arguably following in the footsteps of Lydia when she used her position and resources to set up a church and maintain a group of clerics. The clerics she chose, however, were a divergent group of Numidian bishops, and in becoming their patroness and heading the opposition to the election of the archdeacon Caecilian to the bishopric, she assisted materially with unrest between church factions at the time. Thus she provided a dynamic model for devout female leadership, but not one that was admired (Optatus, *Against the Donatists* 1.16–18).

Possibly worst of all were the Montanists: Montanus' bad repute was further blackened by having female proselytes. Maximilla claimed to speak for Christ: 'Hear not me, but Christ'; and that Christ had sent her to have quasi-priestly power; 'The Lord sent me to be the party-leader, informer, interpreter of this task, profession and covenant' (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 48.12–13). Priscilla claimed the ultimate effrontery, that 'Christ came to me in the likeness of a woman' (*Panarion* 49.1). The Montanists promoted dangerous social precedents: 'these same leading prophetesses, as soon as they were filled with the spirit, abandoned their husbands' (Eusebius, *HE* 5.18). Hippolytus raged that the Montanists 'magnify these wretched women above the Apostles . . . some of them presume to assert that there is in them something superior to Christ' (*Refutation of all Heresies*, 8.19.2). A related sect, the Quintillians, taking as their legitimization the Pauline text 'in Christ . . . there is neither male nor female' (Gal. 3:28), seem to have had a thoroughgoing female ministry: besides female prophets, 'women among them are presbyters, bishops and the rest, as if there were no difference in nature' (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 49.2). Appearing so early in the church's development such women provided a bad model of women's leadership in the church – or a justification that women's leadership was itself, *ipso facto*, a bad model for the church, a deviant tendency promoting heretical proclivities. 'This whole deception is female; the disease comes from Eve, who was deceived long ago', concluded Epiphanius (*Panarion* 79.2), a view shared by many.

One activity, however, in which devout females, orthodox and heterodox alike, seemed to excel was in suffering for the faith: Clement of Rome comments on women; who 'in spite of their bodily frailty, finished the race unshaken and received their noble reward' (1 Cor. 6), and many were the tormented female models who were posited by church writers for their readers' edification – though even in these, some of the elements of their stories offered omens of future difficulties for church theorists. Some unfortunates – Blandina, Agathonice, Irenê and her companions and many others – offered the simple testimony of appearing, witnessing and being executed. Yet amongst the number of women martyrs recorded, it is interesting to speculate what contemporary women in the 'everyday' sphere made of the example of some of those whose legends survive in more detail – figures like Agnes, Eulalia, Perpetua, Felicitas and Thecla – women who turned their backs on their families, abandoned infants, hurled defiance at figures of authority, possessed visionary insights, dressed as men (or dreamed they did), held sway over fellow-believers, taught, baptized themselves, and sometimes died in spectacularly horrible ways.

FROM THE CHURCH IN THE HOUSE TO THE HOUSEHOLD IN CRISIS

It is precisely in this impact which Christianity seems to have on women such as these that its most interesting and divergent consequences can be seen. One of three scenes in a fresco (dated to the latter half of the third century CE) celebrating the life of a Christian woman in the Catacomb of Priscilla (see Figure 17.2) depicts what is now thought to be her marriage by a local bishop (Carletti 1982: 17).¹⁸ If the most potent early influence of Christianity was from within the stronghold of the *domus* –

and thus was difficult to attack from outside because of the more intimate nature of its observances originating within the women's quarters – the influence of Christianity can be seen starting to have a divisive effect on familial relations from early days (Barclay 1997). Women commenced their Christian journey from the point of view of 'in-house' piety, extending their ministry only to their *domus*, their 'own folk': family-members and kinsfolk, slaves and servants.¹⁹ Yet even where the men of their family were left unmoved by the original conversion process, one may posit a more gradual effect if others in the household converted with the woman at the centre of it such that the males in it became surrounded by believers. But if such a change in the woman of the house did not affect her man's perspective in the way she might have hoped, the Apostle ruled 'if a woman has a husband who is not a believer, and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife . . . How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband?' (1 Cor. 7:13–16). But *pace* Paul, the originator of the idea of placing religious duty over family was Christ himself: the gospels relate that his mother and brothers had travelled far to see him but were unable to get through the crowd, and that when told of this, his reaction was 'My mother and brothers, who are they? Those who hear the word of God and act upon it' (Matt. 12:46–50; Mark 3:31–5; Luke 8:19–21). As the new teaching took on its own momentum and assumed the moral high ground, some women were less persuaded by Paul's argument than Christ's attitude. These took a more pragmatic attitude that they were themselves contaminated by unbelief in their family – of parents as of spouses – and found themselves in a dilemma as to whether their mission was to the family, or in defiance of it.

The case of Pomponia Graecina examined above is an early example of the difficulties facing those whose relationships were less religiously harmonized than those of Priscilla and Aquila. It must have been far from easy becoming a Christian while married to a resolute pagan – a factor which becomes progressively of more concern the higher the class, and the greater the vested interest in the status quo. That this was beginning to be perceived as a problem – and specifically a problem emanating from the female half of the union turning to a new faith, with their men lagging behind – is evident not just from these cases but also in the reported attempt of Callistus, bishop of Rome from 217–22, to address such a situation laterally by 'legalizing' Christian women of good family marrying *humiliores*.

For he even permitted unmarried women, if they were burning with passion for an unworthy object or if they were not willing to risk being deposed from their own rank through making a marriage in law, to take to their beds whoever they might choose, slave or free; and said that although not legally married, a woman might consider such a man as her husband.

(Hippolytus, *Refutation of all Heresies* 9.12.24)

Apart from Hippolytus, we know almost nothing of this measure, which probably indicates what kind of purchase it had in actuality – such a measure would surely have met with the rigorously pursued disapproval of Roman authority had it come even close to succeeding. But it does at least indicate a perception of a difficulty: that by implication women of good family were over-represented in the church in

proportion to men of their own background, and that the church preferred that they marry believers, irrespective of what their families might prefer.²⁰ It is noteworthy that wealthy women (as revealed in their expensive clothing) are depicted in the *orans* ('praying') position (as a means of representing their souls at rest) in Roman catacombs from the beginning of the third century CE onwards (see Figure 17.3 for an example). The possibility that women from high social levels were over-represented in the Christian congregations also offered portents of an impending crisis in familial relations.

The family turmoil that a Christian conversion could cause can be vividly seen in a number of examples. A cameo appended by Justin to his account of the martyrdom of Ptolemy and Lucius in c. 160 is of a woman convert formerly of licentious lifestyle who decided that a necessary corollary of her own conversion to Christian living was the divorce of her husband, who still 'sought in every way possible the means of indulging in pleasures contrary to the laws of nature'. She offered him a bill of divorce; his response was to bring an accusation against her as a Christian – potentially condemning her to a death sentence (Justin, *Apology* 2.2). Examples such as this put Callistus' intervention in a more urgent light. When Thecla's mother is portrayed as whipping up the crowd and applying to the governor of Iconium to punish her own daughter, *pour encourager les autres*, she must have represented an extreme example of a family model which embattled converts among the intended readership expected (*Acts of Paul and Thecla* 20; trans. in Kraemer 1988: 280–8).

Other encounters with anti-Christian processes have blood relatives drawing one another into disaster as a result of their co-religiosity and implied support for each other. Some women, in the spirit of the mother of the Maccabees to whom the Christian writers constantly liken them, urged on their relatives to extremes in defence of the faith: thus Ponticus, a youth about 15 years old who was put to the trial with Blandina, was 'encouraged by his sister, so that the heathen could see themselves that it was she that was urging him on and strengthening him' to the point where 'having nobly endured every kind of torture, he gave up his spirit' (Eusebius, *HE* 5.1.53–4). Prudentius hymns a case from the persecutions in Antioch where a young boy of seven was ordered to be put to torture because of the Christian belief taught him by, as he boasts, 'my mother, and God taught her'. At the spectacle of his torture, her attitude is portrayed approvingly as one of cheerful resolution: 'Only the mother showed none of this sorrowing, her brow alone was bright and clear with joy . . . from love of Christ standing firm and unyielding in the face of pain'; and she rebukes the small boy when he admits weakness in calling for water:

I suppose, my son, you are upset by a weak fear and the dread of pain casts you down and overcomes you. This is not what I promised God the child of my body would be, this is not the hope of glory for which I bore you, that you should retreat before death.

(*Peristephanôn Liber* 10.)

She adjures him to think of the living water of Christ's message, and to 'strive after the example of your mother's greatness'; 'cheered' by his mother's lecture, the child purportedly then laughs at his torture, and offers a psalm as he is executed. The nature of this story is repugnant to us; even allowing for its literary set-dressing, it is



Figure 17.3 Roman catacomb fresco of a woman praying, from the first part of the third century CE. Photo from Wilpert (1903: plate 174B).

sobering to think that Prudentius expected such an example to be uplifting to his readership. More normative was the reporting of the reactions of women such as the mother of the teenaged martyr Eulalia, who had tried unsuccessfully to keep her shut away in their country estate; and Origen's mother, whose son was afire to follow his father to the tribunal, and who responded by pleading frantically with him not to go and hiding his clothes to prevent him leaving the house. When it came to the attitude of the mother of the Maccabees, evidently not all Christian mothers followed the official line.

The tendency to implicate the family in ruin is seen with particular poignancy in the examples of female martyrs, many of whom are set in the context of a loving family circle; and the dilemma is stated in the plainest terms by their apologists. Respectable matrons particularly caught the eye because of their refusal to consider the tie to their families as binding as their tie to the faith. Dionysia, who was put to the sword at Alexandria during the Decian persecution, was 'the mother of many children, but did not love them more than the Lord' according to Eusebius (*HE* 6.41). Agathonicê, appearing before the Roman proconsul in Pergamum in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, defied him, and refused to offer sacrifice to the gods:

While the crowd cried out to her, 'have pity on yourself and on your children', the proconsul said: 'look to yourself: have pity on yourself and on your children, as the crowd says'. Agathonicê answered, 'My children have God, who watches over them . . . This is what I have come for and this is what I am prepared for, to die in Christ's name'.

(*The Martyrdom of SS Carpus, Pappylus and Agathonicê* 5)²¹

This phenomenon also emerges in the viewpoint of the children themselves. The Spanish girl Eulalia abandoned a caring family environment to be martyred entirely due to her own efforts during the great persecution of Diocletian: this gently-born 12-year-old fled the family estate to which they had withdrawn on hearing of Christian trials in the nearby town of Merida, and walked some miles in darkness to find the scene of the trials. On arriving at the tribunal, by Prudentius' account she screamed defiance at the governor, denying the validity of the gods and the authority of the emperors. The governor called on her to have pity on her parents' grief, and to think instead of her tender years and return home and contemplate marriage; Eulalia spat in his eyes and kicked over the sacrificial altar, precipitating her execution. In this highly charged literary account, Eulalia chose her fate, quite deliberately: turning her back on a family who valued her and wanted her safe, this 'self-willed girl' (so-called by her admirer Prudentius) aspired to be divided, physically and religiously, from them (*Peristephanôn Liber* 3).

Such an attitude appears again among a group of women from Thessalonica also martyred during the great persecution in 304. *The Martyrdom of SS Agapê, Irenê and Chionê* relates how these seven women 'abandoned their native city, their family, their property and possessions because of love of God' and took to the mountains for two years during the persecution. After their arrest, the prefect Dulcitius quizzed them concerning their concealment of sacred texts, enquiring whether the presence of forbidden material, which would have compromised all the inhabitants of their households, had been known to their families. One of them, Irenê, answered, 'No

one else saw them save for almighty God, who knows all things; certainly no stranger. As for our own relatives, we considered them worse than our enemies, for fear they would denounce us', and further testified that when she fled, she had deliberately left her father in ignorance of her whereabouts (*The Martyrdom of SS Agapê, Irenê and Chionê* 5).²²

Vibia Perpetua, who is profiled in Chapter 41 of this volume, offers the apogee of this attitude. Perpetua's lengthy and detailed account of the build-up to execution for the faith, purporting to be in her own words, is a most complete and graphic account of how some women of the early Christian era experienced the trials before martyrdom in isolation from and opposed by their families. A young married woman of a well-to-do African family, at the time of her arrest in 203 (Shaw 1993: 3) she had recently given birth and was still nursing her baby. She seems to be the only Christian, or at least the only confessor, in her immediate family. Her husband is neither present nor accounted for, her mother and brothers are shadowy presences on the periphery, and her principal concerns while she awaits trial and execution are centred on her dependent baby for whom she was 'tortured with worry', and her father, who bitterly resents her stand for the faith, and represents to her in the plainest terms the consequences to her household and family.

'Daughter', he said, '... have pity on your father, if I deserve to be called your father, if I have favoured you above all your brothers ... do not abandon me to be the reproach of men. Think of your brothers, think of your mother and your aunt, think of your child, who will not be able to live once you are gone. Give up your pride! You will destroy all of us!' ... I was sorry for my father's sake, because he alone of all my kin would be unhappy to see me suffer.

(*The Martyrdom (Passion) of SS Perpetua and Felicitas* 5)

Sorry or not, Perpetua was obdurate and went to trial, where

when it came to my turn, my father appeared with my son, dragged me from the step and said: 'Perform the sacrifice – have pity on your baby!' Hilarianus the governor ... said to me 'Have pity on your ageing father; have pity on your infant son. Offer the sacrifice for the welfare of the emperors.'

(*Perpetua and Felicitas* 6)

Perpetua resisted all appeals to family duty: in response to her father's pressure she reports 'I gave thanks to the Lord that I was separated from my father, and was comforted by his absence', and accounted her final separation from her child in terms designed to reassure her audience that God has relieved her from improper worry:

I sent the deacon Pomponius to my father to ask for the baby. My father refused to hand him over. But as God willed, the baby had no further desire for the breast, nor did I suffer any inflammation, and so I was relieved of any anxiety for my child and of any discomfort in my breasts.

(*Perpetua and Felicitas* 6)

In this account, clinical and cold-blooded as it sounds, we see in detail the process by which at this frightening time a woman of deep commitment to her cause comes to be detaching herself from her comfortable, everyday, home life – now experienced

only as an encumbrance on her faith. Nor is this presented as the easy or obvious option: Perpetua's account sounds the more plausibly her own as it shows most tellingly the high level of anxiety at which concern for the family was present in the women presented so glibly by many of the male authors as lightly discarding home concerns, to make a right end in Christ.

Felicitas reflects her mistress's attitude: heavily pregnant when incarcerated, this would have made it impossible for her to be executed with the others since the law forbade the extreme sanction for pregnant women; she is portrayed as 'distressed' at this possibility. So she and her companions prayed intensely to overcome this obstacle. Sure enough, though only eight months pregnant she gave birth two days before the day of execution, and then willingly gave up her baby to the care of a co-religionist. Though there are references in authors of persecution histories to whole families meeting their fate in the faith together, it is in fact rare to learn of an example like Potamiaena and her mother Macella, who were immolated in the flames in familial, as Christian, unity (*HE* 6.5). Most of the women attested in any detail are represented in isolation, with their abandonment of their families hurled at them as a reproach by the officials or the watching crowd, or by the families themselves.

Even with the ending of the phenomenon of martyrdom, this tendency to devotion in spite of family circumstances goes on. In the century following the victory of the new religion under Constantine, there are many examples of notably devout women abandoning their household and family circle to follow a holy man, or a pilgrim route, or an ascetic lifestyle away from the temptations and distractions of the *domus*. The fight against official constraint might have been over, but the fight against the family took on new vigour with the rise of the ascetic movement in the fourth century, and the belief that the necessity to die for the faith is replaced with the need to 'die to the world'. This meant to many women the abandonment of 'normal' familial relations, duties and property, in pursuit of a life of extreme devotion lived very much outside the household sphere – or sometimes internally within the family unit but at odds with it – and occasionally in the full glare of public attention. The added piquancy to this struggle is that the family-members resisting this 'deviant' female stance were now as likely to be Christian as the woman attempting it.

Especially prominent are the high-profile cases of aristocratic women brought up in the lap of luxury who abandoned extensive and powerful household circumstances to embrace a life of work, privation and degradation in an imitation of poverty-stricken monastics. Women who did this are highlighted in the sources both as models for their sex and for hostile comment. Thus St Melania the Elder (of two St Melanias), from a wealthy and ancient senatorial family, became influenced by the ascetic movement after the tragic deaths of her husband and two of her three children while yet in her twenties. She subsequently decided to leave her opulent Roman home, and her surviving son Publicola, and departed for Egypt, following her spiritual mentor Rufinus, Jerome's great opponent. Following her example were women such as the aristocratic widow Paula, who abandoned a much larger family with some of her offspring still expressing their dependence on her presence. Having sat at the feet of Jerome for several years in Rome, Paula decided to throw up her life

there and accompany him to the Holy Land, financing him and building and assisting in the running of his monastic establishment. Paula took with her only her youngest daughter, Julia Eustochium, who at the age of ten had vowed herself to a life of Christian virginity. She left another daughter, Rufina, on the point of a marriage which she refused to stay and attend, and her youngest child, Toxotius, apparently still a boy, 'extending supplicating hands on the shore' while she, in an echo of the rhetoric surrounding the martyr-women, 'raised dry eyes to heaven, overcoming her devotion as a mother that she might prove herself worthy as a handmaid of God' (Jerome, *Letter* 108.6). A paradigm of the rationale for this anti-familial female strategy is offered by Melania the Elder's distinguished clerical relative, Paulinus of Nola:

She joyfully threw off the burdens of human love along with the ropes of the ship, while all wept . . . she 'loved her son by neglecting him and kept him by relinquishing him' . . . once Melania had torn her only son from her breast and set him in Christ's bosom, so that he might be nourished by the Lord himself, she herself gave him no more personal care, thinking it a sinful lack of faith to still devote attention to one whom she had entrusted to Christ.

(Jerome, *Letter* 29.9)

Her granddaughter, Melania the Younger, pushed the idea to its furthest logical point when she did not abandon duty to the next generation so much as sabotage the possibility of there being one, nullifying all her unwilling family's attempts to set her in a more usual patrician lifestyle as against her own wish to follow an ascetic path. Sole heir to one of the largest aristocratic family fortunes of the time, this young woman succumbed to family pressure to marry another young aristocratic scion and recipient of large family fortune, Pinianus, although she was already manifesting the desire for an ascetic vocation that would dominate her later life. She underwent two attempts to produce the progeny longed for by her family, but with the failure of these hopes – the second pregnancy probably miscarrying largely due to her ascetic endeavours – she succeeded in talking Pinianus into acquiescing in her pursuit of her devotional lifestyle, playing on his guilt at the disastrous outcome of their attempts to have children. He was persuaded by her to abandon 'real' marriage for 'living like brother and sister', and to wholesale abandonment of family property – resisted tooth and nail by their parents and Pinianus' brother – and to the by-now predictable departure for the Holy Land and a life in the cloister, having established twin houses, with her as his spiritual guide.²³

CHRISTIAN ALTERNATIVES FOR FAMILY DUTY

In this strategy of abandoning families in the earlier and the later period, curious topsy-turvy compensations become occasionally visible for the women concerned, related in emotionally laden terminology exactly identifiable with the terms of this conflict. By deserting, wounding, denying their families, they are paradoxically described in the sources as becoming supercharged with particularly female attributes: of beauty, family feeling and nurturing abilities, and with an ability to love

and care for their families – and families-by-extension – in a higher sphere. Perpetua goes to her death ‘with shining countenance’ as ‘the beloved of God, as a wife of Christ’; Felicitas, in an image that deliberately turns on its head the traditional transactions and washing rituals of a normal, joyful childbirth, was ‘glad that she had given birth so that now she could contest with the beasts, going from one bloodbath to another, from the midwife to the gladiator, ready to wash after childbirth in a second baptism’ (*Perpetua and Felicitas* 18). Blandina becomes, by a curious inversion of the nurturing process, the ‘mother’ to all those believers whom she has inspired to their own deaths: ‘Blandina last of all, having, like a noble mother, animated her children and sent them as victors to the great King, travelled herself along the same ground of the conflicts that her children had suffered, and hastened to them rejoicing and exulting at her departure, as one invited to a marriage feast’ (*HE* 5.1). Her contemporary confessors in prison similarly ministered to those who had fallen away from their faith in the time of trial tenderly and solicitously, and ‘exercising the compassion of mothers’ in bringing them back to confess their faith – and die (*HE* 5.2).

The most complete expression of this dilemma is related by Perpetua, maintaining her faith in more or less complete isolation from her family and against their opposition and emotional pressure. In an episode of Socratic dialogue with her father, she discusses the nature of what it means to be a Christian: just as a water-jug cannot be called other than what it is, she cannot be called other than a Christian, for that is what she is. To deny this, besides being a heinous betrayal of the Lord and her fellow-believers, would be untrue and is not to be considered, even though to admit to the truth of one’s nature leads to torture and persecution. Physical suffering is to be endured if it must: to turn one’s back on the truth because of family considerations would be in effect to ‘lose’ the family more surely than by denying them oneself. Confirmation of her right choice is granted to her while in prison, in two peculiarly piquant visions, concerning a brother, Dinocrates, who had died in childhood many years previously, ‘horribly, of cancer of the face’ – evidently a death that had traumatized the family circle at the time. One night in prison she had a very clear vision of Dinocrates evidently suffering from disease, privation and thirst. She subsequently prayed intensively for him during her time in prison, and was rewarded by another dream of him, this time in comfort, healed and at peace (*Perpetua and Felicitas* 7–8). It is not difficult to see this particular series of dreams, occurring just as she is in the tortured process of ‘divorcing’ herself from her family, as a compensatory vision. While turning her back on her family in this world – or because of it, in fact – Perpetua is endowed with the power to save them in the next, and indeed should more properly do so there than here. Her vision validates her decision and goes some way to consoling her for its harshness. This is a particularly vivid articulation of the convictions of these devout women, that they could best serve those they loved by acting out the logic of their beliefs, to succour them in a better way.

SOME CONCLUSIONS: A FEMALE MISSION?

It remains, I believe, reasonably beyond dispute that the role offered to 'everyday' women of the early church was primarily to be subordinated within the Christian movement rather than emancipated by it, whenever its message was legitimately applied. It is difficult to find any examples of women in these centuries demonstrably exercising real capacity for autonomous self-development who were not quickly condemned as heretics, or executed as martyrs. Even those instrumental in setting up a new legitimate focus for worship, such as Priscilla or Lydia, disappear from our gaze when they have done so. The early church household model for worship prefigures the cloistered setting that will become the later expression of legitimate female mission. The fact that Thecla, who seems to be a literary construct even if based on an authentic tradition,²⁴ is the only story we possess from these centuries of a woman preaching the Christian message over an extended period – effectively the only early female *Vita*, as well as the only fully realized model for dynamic womanhood – says much about early church views on the place of women. The model of Thecla should not be ignored on the grounds that it does not represent life as women more usually experienced it in the church at that period. It should not be forgotten that Thecla's story had not merely a level of purchase sufficient to provoke anti-female church writers into trying to discredit it, but an enthusiastic following who welcomed it, and read it yearly in churches, offering it as a model of female devotion. Judging from the number of attempts made to undermine it, provision must be made for its inspirational effect on 'real' women. There are real echoes of Thecla in the stories of some of the women we can observe; in the actions of Maximilla, and in the account of Perpetua.

For there is a perceptible tension in the ideologies being proffered for women in the early church, between the ecclesiastical thinkers who expected women to exercise their devotion from the traditional female domain of the hearthside, and those who manifestly did not. This tension finds expression in odd similarities which can be traced between some of the most respected and some of the most vilified women of the early church period. The women of the Pauline church achieved brief visibility, and then respectable anonymity; but it is not a far jump between what we know of the actions of Priscilla and those of Perpetua, originally another respectable young woman endowed with an unexceptional family background. We know nothing of Perpetua's life prior to her arrest and, had she not had the misfortune to be arrested and become unwillingly centre-stage, she would probably have remained just another anonymous Christian female – however typical or atypical – of this era. However, we happen to have reasonably good testimony to her, and as such she looks reasonably proactive – especially in her evident sway over her group of co-religionists. But we cannot know if Priscilla or Lydia or the other women with churches in their households also had this kind of influence, in privacy, in secrecy. Nor do we know why Perpetua had such a position within her group: whether through being a confessor in prison (which others would have shared), or whether because she was a Montanist, as has been suspected; or whether this reflects a purely local divergence in her own church. It is not possible to tell, with so little contextual information, any more than we know what Priscilla really did in the church she

helped to found. All we can say is that Perpetua was dynamic, inspirational and respected in her church. And in this respect there is still less distance between Perpetua and Prisca – the Montanist Prisca, with whom Perpetua on the surface has much more in common than Paul's Priscilla, as another woman of vocation for whom the household model for women's piety did not appeal. Priscilla, Perpetua and Prisca have things in common, not least their spiritual gifts and an inclination for leadership: but Perpetua became a saint with Paul's Priscilla, while Prisca and her colleague Maximilla – women exercising Perpetua's gifts for prophecy and self-aware authority over their peers, but not marked for speedy extinction – were anathematized. It is interesting to speculate whether the sainted Perpetua might have shared this fate had she not been removed from the public gaze.

Because of this dichotomy, it is always difficult to know even where it is appropriate to assess 'women's activities' in the church. To some degree any question as to the 'everyday' experience of women in the early Christian centuries is effectively a meaningless enquiry. Firstly, there is obvious difficulty in forming coherent normative theories when so much of the 'normal' observances of devout women were conducted behind closed doors; second, because there does exist a confusing amount of evidence for women's activities which then seems to contradict such an assumption – but evidence which exists in fact largely as a measure of what women were atypically high-profile for doing, or should not have been doing. It is only when devout females were flushed out into the open – often as martyrs or heretics, defined by persecution from the secular authorities, their families or the church – that we can see women of the pre-Constantinian church being actively and self-definedly Christian. This leads us to the inescapable conclusion that, by definition, being visibly proactive in the Christian context, for women – whether ministering, suffering, or schismatizing – is an abnormal activity in itself.

This can be seen in the patristic writers' minute examination of the heretical movements for their links with female activity: the whole area of heresy should certainly be seen in the context of 'Christian women's activity of the time', and indisputably is an aspect of any consideration of the influence of women on the church. Involvement in heretical movements does not discredit their ubiquity and ongoing energy so much as constituting yet further proof that women were always in on the ground floor of new movements, supporting and propagating them. This was, as we have seen, true in the time of the gospel; and from then onwards, any new cult would also swiftly find female followers. Within the first generation, this was true of the already aberrant strain in the followers of Christ referred to in Acts (8.9–24), that of Simon Magus and 'the first sect to start after Christ', whose notoriety was unimproved by his muse, 'a female vagabond from Tyre named Helen . . . this whore, his paramour, whom he dared to say was the Holy Spirit' (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 21.1.1). From then on, as we have seen, it is a tendency that continues as successfully as Christianity itself. But women rarely picked to follow 'a heresy', in the sense of evaluating a heterodox line of reasoning over the mainstream; we are more often looking at a situation where they opted to believe in and follow the man propagating it.

This is a recurring pattern: from Lydia with Paul in the first century to Paula with Jerome in the fourth, where there is a holy man there is a female supporter; and from

Simon Magus and Helen in the first century to Rufinus and Melania in the fourth, when the men fall out over orthodoxy, the women find themselves in the firing line. The much-revered Melania the Elder found in following Rufinus that the contested issue was whether her hitherto respected mentor's beliefs – and thus by extension hers – were in fact heretical, largely owing to Jerome's spleen. Maximilla probably had no idea what would be the culmination of her association with Montanus – whose movement completely lost the battle for inclusion despite the best efforts of the still-respected Tertullian to defend it. When we see how many originally respected clerical thinkers had to deflect suspicions of heresy, and how much it fell to chance whether these men were rehabilitated, anathematized, or left permanently tainted with suspicion – men of such influence on the church as Origen, Cyprian, Rufinus, Eusebius, and others – it is little wonder if the women and men who were their admirers could not predict the course of true orthodoxy. Nor was it a matter worthy of such comment that men also followed heretical movements, since men in this era are not defined principally *by* their gender in the same way as women; and heresy becomes definable not least by dubious female activity. When a movement was adjudged heresy on other grounds it was easy to point the finger and use the presence of female activists as a tool of ridicule, because of their constant presence. But women in a movement of the 'orthodox' tendency – probably of the same type, class and degree of devoutness as the 'vulgar women' of the heretical movements, merely differing in their taste in clerics – were simply known as pious ladies, and as such deemed to be above (or beneath) discussion.

These women examined above are, as we have seen, some of the exceptional examples, most of whose tales were recounted because they were inspirational. Not all women took to Christianity before their menfolk; and of those who did, not all of them took their faith to the ends of becoming agitators or martyrs or prophetesses. Some when faced with the prospect of persecution, like bishop Cyprian ran, and hid, and survived as Christians, or when faced with the awful final test of martyrdom, recanted. Some Christian men and women never even experienced these trials; some carried on their lives in much the same way as their pagan forebears, even in areas which might have seemed to throw up conflicts – thus pagan imagery next to Christian in catacombs, and the continued use of the same curses and spells from pagan to Christian Egypt – altered merely by invoking the influence of a combination of Christ and the spirits for protection, for vengeance, for medicine and (as ever) for love (see Meyer and Smith 1994).

But for those who took the message more seriously and literally, we have seen the influence of Christianity work from its quiet spread in the seclusion of the household, to setting the household against the world, and finally to turning it in on itself and subverting the cultural assumptions and values associated with family and household. Christianity, with its radical eschatological message evolved counter-cultural notions of family and community that, taken to their limits, could utterly defeat old family strategies. This is perhaps best seen in the example of the women of the new Christian families: following new concepts of motherhood, no longer was it the mother who looked after her family, and husbanded their resources, who was held as the model. In the turbulent persecutions, and in the eschatology-preoccupied later empire, devout Christian females found much currency in the

notion that to desert one's family was to look to their care, and to impoverish them was to look to their heavenly well-being. Ambrose might well have advised a teenage girl opposed in her vocation as a nun by her family to 'conquer family feeling first; if you overcome your household, you overcome the world' (*De virginibus* [*On Virginity*] 1.11.63). All too many of these women quite literally overcame, or rather overturned, their households. For the households concerned, they came to understand at first-hand the literal truth of Christ's statement:

Brother will betray brother to his death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death . . . Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.

(Matt. 10:21, 34–6)

The real import of such Christian texts as this was perceived in all its harshness by some family units in the imperial Roman era. For the story of the success of Christianity in the early period might probably be best read, if only it were possible to do so accurately, within the confines of the household. It is possible that the conversion of women, particularly of the more respectable classes, tending to include as it did families and households taken along sometimes willy-nilly, might well be responsible for more weight of numbers and influence than all that male apostles and proselytes could do in the area of public debate and word-slinging.

It is also the story of the transformation of the family. As the message spread through the family network, it went a fair way to destroying it, or at least common notions of what was proper to it. On the one hand, Christianity promoted a more internally cohesive, loyal, inward-looking, 'nuclear' model of 'the family', attempting to concentrate the attention and activities of the womenfolk in the 'proper' domestic sphere, and attaching their relationship to their kin via a deeper ideological tie, a loyalty cemented through the adhesion of being imperilled co-religionists rather than through the normative approval of the wider world. On the other hand, Christianity succeeded in promoting activities that were ultimately destructive of the familial/household environment. It bore a message that used the family circumstance in such a way as to induce that environment to turn it in on itself and consume itself.

There is a logical point past which the message of Christianity becomes radically anti-familial; yet we should not forget that the success of this particular aspect of its message may be in part also because of the furnace the movement went through. It encountered a time of trial that seemed to bear out Christ's awful predictions reported in Matthew's gospel of the last days, and of how particularly dreadful it would be in that time for those with family commitments. Such dire warnings, experienced as literally true in a time of persecution when those with such ties were perceived as most vulnerable, must have been a strong factor in convincing some of the Christian audience of the need for wholesale abandonment of family considerations. Christianity first used the family unit, then turned it into the fifth column, the enemy within.

These devout women who were so essential to its transmission accordingly become written of in family-oriented terminology that inverts the 'proper' order, while still tying them to the concept of the household in the context of which women must be seen. The martyr women are 'midwives' to a death rather than a birth process; they become 'mothers' by giving death to their extra-familial 'children' – but to the avowed end of the longed-for rebirth in Christ. Although woman, according to pagan philosophers and Paul, is the most basic foundation of an *oikos*, Paul was already too late in the first generation after Christ in abjuring women to stick close to the household. For many pious women Christ's teaching of the family-as-millstone already struck a chord and, with the furnace of the end of the age which he predicted manifesting itself, his teaching to abandon the 'proper' order had for some more resonance than Paul's appeal to maintain the status quo. If the woman was the heart of the household, and the household was the heart of the conversion process, the ministry of women within the household – whether it led to the arena or to the cloister – eventually succeeded in ripping out the heart of many households in the Roman era.

NOTES

- 1 This topic – and the evolution of scholastic opinion on it – is an area of study of immense growth in recent interest, which is impossible to summarize adequately without going into far greater length than space here allows. Briefly listing, then, only some of the most critical and influential studies over the history of this area: Brown (1977: 208–26), Daniélou (1961), Harnack (1908: II, 64–84), Meeks (1974: 165–208), Cameron (1980: 60–8), Kraemer (1992: 128–56), Shaw (1993: 3–45) and Witherington (1988). For more recent and comprehensive coverage: Clark (1983), Cloke (1995), Sawyer (1996) and Ruether (1998). And for a very clear-eyed and concise survey of the way in which studies of this field have evolved over the last 20 years – and some timely words of caution about trends in methodology applied therein – see Gillian Clark's admirable *Introduction* to McAuslan and Walcot (1996: 1–17).
- 2 Matt. 9:18–25; 15:22–8; 21:31–2; 26:7–13; Mark 5:21–43; 7:24; 14:1–9; Luke 7:36–48; 8:1–3, 40–56; 10:38–42; John 4:1–30; 11:1–44.
- 3 For an examination of the contemporary cultural norms subverted by the behaviour of the two protagonists in this story and the different interpretations it has been made to bear, cf. Neyrey (1994: 82–9) and Esler (1994: 32–3).
- 4 Acts 18:1–3, 18–26; Rom 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19.
- 5 Rom. 16:13, 15; Philem. 2; 2 John 1.
- 6 Thus Brooten (1977); see also Kraemer (1992: 36) and Meeks (1983: 57).
- 7 Witness the number of admonishments addressed to slaves by the apostles and their successors; e.g. Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22; 1 Pet. 2:18; Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to Polycarp* 4.
- 8 For the social composition of the communities in Acts and the women represented within them, cf. Meeks (1983: 23–32), Kraemer (1992, ch. 10) and Esler (1987: 183–5).
- 9 See Leclercq (1907) and Hertling and Kirschbaum (1956).
- 10 So Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.18, following the Christian tradition; reported in Dio Cassius as 'atheism' and 'Jewish customs'.
- 11 Tertullian, *Ad Uxorem* [*To His Wife*] 2.4.2; as advice it represents an ideal, as practice its typicality is difficult to establish.

- 12 Ignatius of Antioch advised brides and bridegrooms to celebrate their weddings with the consent of the bishop – *Letter to Polycarp* 5. It was previously thought (see Wilpert 1903: plate 79) that this fresco represented the veiling of a consecrated virgin.
- 13 Cf. Ruether (1998: 30–43) on this in more detail; concluding that ‘women felt able to participate in Christian assemblies in spontaneous, ecstatic testimony, mingling with tongues . . . mandated by a belief that women’s status had already been raised to equality with men in the New Creation’ (p. 37).
- 14 Luke 2:36–38; Acts 21:9 – a rare reference in the New Testament that also seems to denote a self-conscious decision for virginity in these women; Revelation 2:20.
- 15 Commenting on the example of Deborah, female judge and prophet of the Old Testament.
- 16 Eusebius, *HE* 4.15 and 5.3; *The Martyrdom of SS Carpus, Papyrus and Agathonice*, cf. Musurillo (1972). *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* 21; *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas* 7, 10–14.
- 17 Cf. Shaw (1993: 26), who concludes of Perpetua’s visions, ‘They are truly extraordinary in the quality of their reportage. Whatever the traditional and stereotypical images contained in them, there is no reasonable question of their authenticity.’
- 18 Though some commentators also argue, from the lack of consistency in tone and subject-matter, that these verses may be ‘probably not from Paul himself’ (Ruether 1998: 37) but ‘a post-Pauline interpolation (along the lines of 1 Tim. 2:12)’ (Grudem 1982: 240); cf. also Bittlinger 1967: 110ff.). But for this theme being the authentic voice of Paul, cf. Schüssler Fiorenza (1983: 232–3) and Stegemann (1993: 162–3).
- 19 While cognizant of the difficulties of this area as seen in the recent welter of scholarship exploring what exactly constituted the ‘household’, ‘privacy’ and even ‘the family’, a survey of this size cannot do justice to it; assuming that there were at least perceptions among the Romans of the family as a dependable entity around which other structures were formulated, I am drawing on suggestions that most evidence of family bond support systems tend to be found amongst the communities most receptive to Christianity – cf. Beryl Rawson in her Introduction to Hawley and Levick (1996). For more detailed work on the area of family, household and community, see Bradley (1991), Dixon (1988, 1992), Moxnes (1997) and Rawson (1992).
- 20 ‘Whether we side with Callistus or with Hippolytus, it must be admitted that the former’s policy was designed to meet an actual situation . . . the “ecclesiastical” marriages were designed to deal with a situation in which women of good family outnumbered men of like status in the Church, and in which the disadvantages of “mixed” marriages were obvious’ (Stevenson 1957: 167).
- 21 The text of *The Martyrdom of SS Carpus, Papyrus and Agathonice* is given with an English translation in Musurillo (1972: 22–37).
- 22 The text of *The Martyrdom of SS Agapè, Irenè and Chionè* is given with an English translation in Musurillo (1972: 280–93).
- 23 Gerontius, *Life of Melania the Younger*, *passim*.
- 24 Tertullian discredited the whole story as the work of a presbyter in Asia Minor (*De Baptismo* [*On Baptism*] 17); on the possibility of authenticating Thecla’s legend, see Daniélou (1961: 8–9), Aspegren (1990: 99) and Kraemer (1992: 150–3).

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COMMUNICATION AND TRAVEL



Blake Leyerle

THE SLOWNESS OF COMMUNICATION

In antiquity, news travelled no faster than people. In our age of instantaneous communication, the reality of a world in which a letter from Syria to Rome might spend one hundred days in transit (Cicero, *Epistulae ad Familiares* 12.10.2) seems almost unimaginable. But to early Christians, a lag between an event and its report was so inevitable that Anthony can attribute the apparent ability of demons to foretell the future to the speedy thinness of their bodies. Having seen a person start out on a journey, or the rains beginning in Ethiopia, they can race ahead and, arriving well in advance of human messengers, astonish people with accurate predictions of an unexpected visit or the flooding of the Nile (Athanasius, *Life of Anthony* 31–2). Holy bodies shared this uncanny agility. After Apa Ammonathas, for example, had promised to travel to Alexandria to petition the emperor that monks be exempted from the poll-tax, the brothers were ‘dissatisfied’ when two weeks later (apparently the expected time for such a trip) they had not seen the old man stir from his cell. But on the fifteenth day, he came bearing a letter with the emperor’s seal. In response to their query, ‘When did you get that, Apa?’ he replied, ‘That very night I went to the emperor, who wrote this decree, then, going to Alexandria, I had it countersigned by the magistrate.’ Hearing this miraculous feat, the brothers were appropriately ‘filled with fear’ (*Apophthegmata Patrum*, Ammonathas 1 [PG 65. 136–7]). The gift of instantaneous communication was given only to the holy. Sitting on his mountain, Anthony knew the moment that Amun had died as he saw him being led up to heaven. When the brothers from Nitria arrived with the news 13 days later, they were stunned to learn that Anthony had already known of Amun’s death (*Life of Anthony* 60; cf. Jerome, *Life of Paul* 14). Such stories of exceptional mobility and immediate knowledge simply underscore the expected slowness with which news and people regularly travelled. In the face of this overwhelming physical fact, the bulk of any chapter on communication in the early Christian world of Late antiquity must focus on travel: its modes, impediments and facilities.

THE REASONS FOR TRAVEL

General

Then as now, people travelled for a variety of reasons, most of them applying to Christian and non-Christian alike. Business matters no doubt accounted for the bulk of traffic on the road. Petitions, such as the one carried by Ammonathas, had to be delivered by hand (Bagnall 1993: 162–3), and merchants necessarily shuttled between their sources of supply and their markets. Trade ‘in honey, cheese, and other foodstuffs of that kind used by innkeepers’, we are told, kept one of Lucius’ fellow travellers regularly on the road through Thessaly, Aetolia and Boeotia (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 1.5). Landlords, like Pliny the Younger, needed to visit their distant estates (Pliny, *Letters* 3.19.4; 1.3.2; 9.15.3; 4.14.8). Government or military officials traversed the empire to sites of distant operations, but they preferred, whenever feasible, to have others do their travelling for them. Thus couriers and minor officials bearing letters, official decrees, reports, and gifts criss-crossed the empire.

For the sake of higher education, promising students travelled to centres of learning (Llewelyn 1998: 117–21). For advanced rhetorical instruction, one might go to Athens or Antioch, but for legal training Beirut was the place. Later, as teachers, they would travel to lecture or take up positions. The promise of more docile students brought Augustine to Rome, but he was later lured to Milan by the expectation of a more lucrative position (*Confessions* 5.8, 5.13). Sight-seeing was an additional educational privilege enjoyed by the moneyed (Lucian of Samosata, *De morte peregrini* 35; Apuleius, *Met.* 2.21; Aelius Aristides, *Oration* 36), as inscriptions on the Colossus of Memnon in Egypt attest (Chevallier 1976: 147). Thus Libanius consoled the Jewish patriarch, whose son, sent to study with Libanius, had run away, with the recollection that travelling had made Odysseus wise (*Ep.* 1098). And Chrysostom complained that whereas a man who had ‘traveled over much country’ could ‘report with great precision the number of stadia and the arrangement of cities: their layout, harbors, and markets,’ his sluggish congregation had gained no knowledge of their distance from the city of heaven (*In Matt. homiliae* 1.7 [PG 57.22]).

Christian reasons for communication and travel

Missionary travel

To the reasons that spurred on their Graeco-Roman neighbours, Christians added some other institutionally specific ones. From its foundation by itinerant preachers, missionary activity remained a hallmark of the early church. Once founded, individual churches depended upon ongoing travel for material and ideological support (1 Cor. 16:1–4; 2 Cor. 7:12; Rom. 15:25–7; Phil. 4:16; cf. Acts 24:17; Thompson 1998). Writing from Corinth to the Christians in Rome, Paul says that he hopes to visit them *en route* to Spain, but that he must first go to Jerusalem (Rom. 15:24–9). The nonchalance with which he proposes this ambitious itinerary is striking; even more astonishing is the apostle’s assumption that his audience will share his

confidence. But since Paul could not be everywhere, he relied upon emissaries to gather and disseminate news, to encourage and teach – in general to build up the churches in his absence (Llewelyn 1998: 54–7).

Involuntary travel

Not all early Christian travel was voluntary. Both Paul and Ignatius were compelled by the state to go to Rome and their death. Doctrinal or disciplinary controversy might constrain the presence of clerics, as when bishop Theophilus was compelled to travel from Alexandria to Constantinople to answer charges brought against him by the Egyptian ascetics known to us as the Tall Brothers (Palladius, *Dialogus de vita S. J. Chrysostomi* 7.87–9; Socrates, *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.15; Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica* 8.16).

Ecclesiastical order

Yet the congestion occasioned by the press of ecclesiastical travel had been apparent to Ammianus Marcellinus decades earlier, when he complained of the ‘throngs of bishops hastening hither and thither on the public mounts’ (21.16.18). The need for large numbers of bishops (with various types of assistants) to attend the numerous church councils during this period (see Chapter 25 of this volume) was the spur to much of this traffic.

Christian pilgrimage

Among the specifically Christian reasons for travel, pilgrimage merits particular attention. Not that it was unknown in the ancient world, as hope had long urged the sick to make their way to healing shrines and pilgrims to holy sites (Kötting 1950: 33–53). We hear, for example, that Pliny the Elder sent his freedman Zosimus to Egypt and then to Fréjus because he was spitting blood (*Ep.* 5.19), and that Aelius Aristides travelled to a number of Asclepian shrines in search of ‘comfort’ from his multiple afflictions – a concept that combined the hope of healing with that of religious experience (*Sacred Tales* 2.49–50; 3.6–7; 4.83; 6.1). But in the wake of Constantine’s and his mother Helena’s ambitious building programme, the phenomenon of Christian pilgrimage, especially to the Holy Land, increased tremendously in scope and importance (Hunt 1982: 35–42).

While a few pilgrims had come to Palestine ‘for prayer and investigation’ in the third century (Eusebius, *Historiae ecclesiasticae* 6.11; Wilken 1992: 109), it was the lure of being ‘on the very spot’ that brought Egeria to the Holy Land in the following century (*Itinerarium Egeriae* 4.6) and caused John Chrysostom to wish for the leisure and bodily strength to travel to Philippi where the chains that had imprisoned Paul were still on display (*In Eph. Homiliae* 8.2). So powerful was this sense of place that Jerome promised Marcella that if she came to Palestine she would see not simply the sites where scriptural events occurred, but the actual events themselves. Together, he assures her, they will ‘see Lazarus come forth tied up in winding bands . . . and perceive the prophet Amos sounding the shepherd’s horn



Figure 18.1 Sixth century CE mosaic map from Madaba in Jordan with detail of Jerusalem.
Photo J. C. N. Coulston.

upon his mountain' (*Ep.* 46.13; cf. *Ep.* 108.10) To be in the place of revelation is to be in the time of revelation (Wilken 1992: 120). Another anonymous pilgrim made scripture his own by scratching onto a wall in the church of the Holy Sepulchre the words, 'Lord, we came' (compare Ps. 122), under a rough sketch of a typical third- or fourth-century boat (Figure 18.2).

For others, the goal of pilgrimage was a person rather than a place. So many visitors travelled to hear 'a word' from the solitaries of Egypt, that Apa Arsenius feared that the sea had become a highway (Arsenius, *Apophthegmata Patrum* 28). Yet despite Arsenius' misgivings, monastic communities dotted the main pilgrim routes at convenient intervals precisely in order to supply the needs of pilgrims (Hirschfeld 1992: 55–6; Hunt 1982: 62–6). Along with food and lodging (at least for a week according to Palladius, *Lausiac History* 7), they provided a certain amount of tour guidance. Their confidence in being able to identify the places where scriptural events had occurred rested, according to Egeria, upon a 'tradition . . . handed down to them by their predecessors' (*Itinerarium Egeriae* 12.2–4). Identification was then solidified by the ritual recitation of scripture (*Itinerarium Egeriae* 4.3; 10.7; 14.1). Such monastic hospitality was not wholly disinterested as pilgrimage had become an increasingly common prelude to entering the monastic life.

The routes of five early Christian pilgrims have been conveniently mapped by Hunt: those of the Bordeaux Pilgrim in 333, Melania the Elder in 373–400, Egeria



Figure 18.2 Pilgrim graffito in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem, the Latin inscription reading *Domine ivimus* ('Lord we came'). Photo Zev Radovan/Jerusalem.

in 381–4, Paula and Jerome in 385 and Postuminianus in c. 400 (1982: 52; see Figure 18.3).

Enabling this growing movement of pilgrims was the vast network of roads and shipping routes established by the Romans to serve their military interests in Palestine (Hunt 1982: 52–8). As all wayfarers shared perforce the same infrastructure of travel, only motivation separated pilgrim from commercial traveller. Indeed it is our earliest pilgrimage account that provides our best evidence for the state of communications in the empire. Meticulously tracing a step-by-step itinerary, the anonymous pilgrim from Bordeaux notes the precise distance between cities, changes of horses, and overnight stays from his home to the Holy Land, no doubt hoping to facilitate the future travel of others (*Itinerarium Burdigalense*). In addition to written records, pilgrims sent or brought home other tangible mementos: small quantities of soil, rock, water, or indigenous produce from the holy land. Flasks of blessed oil, often decorated with scenes of particular holy sites, were especially popular. Not simply souvenirs, these objects shared in the power of the land. Serving as religious sights in their own right for non-travellers back home, they no doubt stirred in others the desire to take to the road (Leyerle 1996).

Social networking and travel

The result of all this movement was enhanced communication as far off people were brought into contact. So common was it, indeed, for settlements to spring up along roadways that vanished roadways can now be reconstructed from patterns of human

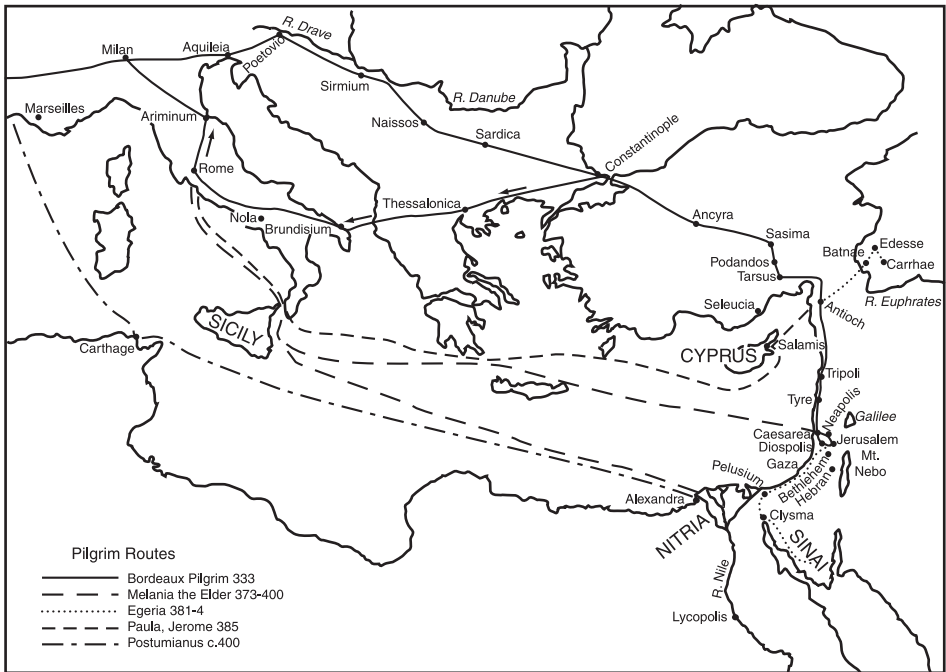


Figure 18.3 Map of major pilgrim routes to the Holy Land in the fourth century. From Hunt (1982: 52), by permission of the Clarendon Press, Oxford.

settlement (Chevallier 1976: 43, 117). But we would be wrong to view social networks as simply the result of travel; they were equally often its cause. The recent application of social network theory to early Christianity has illuminated the extent to which pre-existing bonds of kinship, friendship and patronage encouraged people to travel, write letters, and send gifts (White 1992; Clark 1992). By serving as couriers, new people were introduced into the network and their belonging then cemented through reciprocated hospitality. As friends of friends developed independent relationships, the web of communication grew sturdier and more complex. At every step the astonishingly dense communication network created by early Christianity was dependent upon the movement of bodies, whose mobility was in turn enabled by a vast web of roads and shipping routes that linked the distant outposts of the empire. It is thus to the experience and infrastructure of travel and communication that we must now turn.

THE EXPERIENCE AND INFRASTRUCTURE OF TRAVEL AND COMMUNICATION

Travel by land

At the height of the empire, some 300,000 kilometres of gravelled or paved highways linked the disparate provinces to Rome (Forbes 1955: 138). As we would expect, the quality of these roads varied tremendously. Not only were main routes better constructed and maintained than secondary paths, but construction techniques always had to be accommodated to local materials. Thus even stretches of the same road can evidence considerable variation.

The majority of routes were simply gravelled paths. Under dry conditions, these were perfectly adequate, but in poor weather they might turn into 'deep impassable mud'. Procopius describes one notoriously frightful stretch in ancient Bithynia on which innumerable travellers and animals perished (Procopius, *de aedificiis* 5.3.12–3). And if so thoroughly compromised by a single season of heavy rains, it is no wonder that these routes have not withstood the passage of centuries. What remains are stretches of premier roadway, the result of skilled engineering and considerable monetary outlay.

First a bed was dug and levelled. On all but the flattest terrain, absolute straightness was abandoned in favour of following the contours of the land. On hillsides, beds were laid slightly below the crest to take advantage of firmer footing and better drainage as well as to afford troops a degree of protection while travelling through hostile territory (Chevallier 1976: 114). This same concern for safety dictated that densely wooded areas be avoided and underbrush cleared back from the roads. In rugged terrain, routes usually followed older paths, skirting mountains and avoiding defiles. But if the need were great enough, Roman engineers were prepared to bore through mountains or cantilever a roadway along the side of a cliff (Chevallier 1976: 104–6; Forbes 1955: 150). Throughout the empire, impressive bridges, like the one at Cordoba (Figure 18.4), were built to carry roads across major rivers.

Road width varied according to use, importance, and terrain. In the open countryside, a width of 15–20 feet was customary so that vehicles could pass each other. Roads widened as they approached major towns and around curves and narrowed when going through difficult terrain (Chevallier 1976: 66, 89). Even when boring through solid rock, however, military routes had to be at least eight feet wide to accommodate heavy baggage wagons. The most typical width seems to have been ten Roman feet (Casson 1988: 354), a distance only slightly less than a modern lane measured from the paint lines marking off the lane on each side.

Once the roadbed was prepared, it was filled with a foundation mixture of broken pottery, small stones, and often some waterproofing material. This mixture was then rammed down by heavy rollers to prevent pockets that could collect water and lead to heaving and cracking. Finally, flat paving stones were fitted closely together to form, ideally, an unbroken surface (Casson 1988: 354; Forbes 1955: 146–7). To facilitate drainage, the surface was slightly crowned and ditches were dug on either



Figure 18.4 The Roman bridge at Cordoba. Photo J. C. N. Coulston.

side. These were usually ten feet wide and as deep as the foundation course, though they might run as deep as ten feet. The result of this labour was a road some 100–140 centimetres (39–55 inches) deep, or three to four times the depth of a modern roadbed (Forbes 1955: 148). Roads built over unstable ground might require even more elaborate construction techniques. In the low-lying country of modern Belgium, undercourses of logs were laid across the roadbed and pinned to the ground by stakes before receiving the usual layers of gravelling and paving stones (Chevallier 1976: 89–90).

This impressive technology gave Roman roads exceptional durability: they could sustain the wear of iron wheels for 70–100 years before needing thorough reconstruction, though high-traffic stretches might need servicing every 30–40 years. Even relatively simple cobble roads, in which cobbles were embedded in a ten centimetre (3.9 inch) sandbed, probably had a life of 10–15 years (Forbes 1955: 148–9). A road's longevity was, in part, determined by weather. In the northern parts of the empire, roads were subject to frost damage such as cracks and potholes. By the end of the empire, the task of road repair had outstripped the construction of new routes.

The cost of these roads was understandably high. Funding for roadworks was initially raised through direct taxation. Private officials might also contribute their own money to this public work. In return, they expected to receive public recognition and honour, often in the form of inscribed milestones (*CIL* 10.5416; 5.8668; 10.3851; Justinian, *Digest* 31.10). These were columnar markers set at regular



Figure 18.5 Section of a paved Roman road showing curbing, Jerash, Jordan. Photo Andrew Leyerle.

intervals along the road and readily visible from a distance, as they stood some six to eight feet (2–2.4 metres) above the ground. While the earliest examples were simply inscribed with the distance from the nearest city, later ones often bear a list of the public works of the donor responsible for funding the road's construction (e.g. *CIL* 12.1524; Chevallier 1976: 39–44). Where successive patrons vied to commemorate their public-spirited generosity, milestones occur in clusters. Within Italy, the maintenance of the road system gradually devolved upon specially appointed officials, but in the provinces it remained a duty of the governor – one closely related to the preservation of peace (Ramsay 1904: 392).

The speed of travel along these well-engineered and costly roads strikes us as almost unbelievably slow. Casson estimates that a person, travelling by foot on level ground, would go on average 15–20 miles per day (Casson 1974: 188). Thus on his forced march from Antioch to Rome, Ignatius would have spent 86 days walking and nine days aboard ship (Ramsay 1904: 384–6). In a carriage, one could reasonably expect to cover 25–30 miles a day at a rate of four miles an hour. Under duress,



Figure 18.6 The Roman road from Jerusalem to Jerash, built in the reign of Hadrian. Photo Erich Lessing, Art Resource, New York City.

this rate might increase to as much as 40 or 45 miles per day, but not for long (Chevallier 1976: 188). While horses were the swiftest means of conveyance, they were seldom used because of their costliness. Not only were they expensive to buy, they required a high-quality, costly, diet. Unable to sustain hard driving, they proved less sure-footed over uneven terrain. For heavy loads of grain or metals, oxen were the best choice. Their pace was slow at 10–15 kilometres per day, but sustainable over long distances and on an inferior diet readily available to most Greek and Roman farmers (White 1984: 52). Donkeys were popular, especially in mountainous regions, but the load they could carry was significantly less than a horse (White 1984: 129). By far the most popular animal for travelling was therefore the mule, a cross between a horse and a donkey that combined the best features of both. Camels were also used in sandy regions (*It. Eg.* 6.1–2; Casson 1988: 356; Bagnall 1993: 38–40).

A variety of carts, carriages, and litters were available. Of these, the most comfortable but also the slowest was the litter, in which one sat or reclined while being conveyed by animals or a group of sturdy men (Casson 1988: 356–7). It was thus in a gesture of asceticism that Paula exchanged her customary litter for a mule on her pilgrimage through Palestine (Jerome, *Ep.* 108.7). For swifter travel, two- and

four-wheeled vehicles (*carpentum*, *raeda*) were available (Ammianus Marcellinus 29.6; Chevallier 1976: 178–81; Casson 1988: 356). Those desiring protection from the elements or from the eyes of others might choose a closed carriage, as Pliny did when suffering from eye-strain (*Ep.* 7.21), or Gregory of Nyssa when forced to abandon monastic seclusion for a trip to the Holy Land (*Ep.* 2).

A number of technological problems slowed the progress of vehicles. Traction was generally poor without ‘dished’ wheels that could grip the crowned road surface. Indeed, where routes ran along sheer drops, deep grooves were scored into the pavement to guide the wheels (Chevallier 1976: 89; Forbes 1955: 138). A fixed front axle demanded a slow, wide arc on every turn. Without ball or roller bearings, or even cost-effective lubrication, wheel hubs were vulnerable to friction from the axle (Harris 1974; Casson 1988: 356). Any steep gradient posed a real danger to a heavily laden wagon, since neither efficient bits nor brakes had been invented. There was, moreover, always the danger of an animal slipping on slick sections of the stone-paved road (Polge 1967: 28–54). The earliest horse ‘shoes’ were, in fact, designed to hold hobnail studs to improve traction, rather than to protect sensitive hooves (Apuleius, *Met.* 4.4, 9.32; Green 1966: 305–8). Finally, none of the wheeled conveyances had any suspension system. Given the bone-jarring prospect of long-distance driving, most people preferred to walk.

The laborious difficulty of travel over land is graphically summed up in the prices for conveyance of goods. From Diocletian’s Price Edict of 301, A. H. M. Jones has calculated that a wagon-load of wheat doubled its price every 300 miles (1964: II, 841); Yeo’s older estimate puts this doubling at every hundred miles (1946). At such a rate, it was far cheaper to bring wheat to Rome from Egypt by ship than to carry it even 75 miles by road. Personal travel was also costly. Apuleius writes that the outlay necessary for Lucius’ trip from Corinth to Rome ‘melted away his humble inheritance’ (*Met.* 11.28).

To the intrinsic discomforts of travel, we must add the danger of bandits. Suetonius and Strabo both praise Augustus for suppressing brigandry by extending the road-system and installing military posts (*Augustus* 32; *Geography* 4.6.6), but Luke’s story of the Good Samaritan takes for granted the likelihood of robbers setting upon travellers on deserted stretches of road (10:30; cf. 2 Cor. 11:26; cf. Pliny, *Natural History* 6.25; Apuleius, *Met.* 1.7). In 296 CE, a soldier wrote to his wife: ‘Bring your gold jewelry with you, but don’t wear it!’ (*P. Mich.* 214). Poorer travellers were always more vulnerable to assault than the rich, who typically travelled with a retinue and might even have the resources to hire a military escort (Lucian, *Alexander* 55). Certain routes were, we gather, best avoided. Basil was surprised that no one had warned the priest Dorotheus that the road to Rome from Constantinople was impassable in winter, ‘being full of enemies’ (*Epistles* 215). Despite these perils, everyone knew that things had been worse. Abraham’s ready obedience to God’s command to go to a place he did not know is all the more impressive, according to Chrysostom, since ‘at that time traveling was so unpleasant; it was not possible then, as it is now, to mingle with others safely and to travel abroad without apprehension’ (*In Genesim homiliae* 31.5 [PG 53.290]).

Even if one managed to avoid the clutches of bandits, there was no escape from the irritation of gnats or the chugging of bullfrogs that might make sleep quite

impossible (Horace, *Sermones* 1.5.14–17). Other perils included roving packs of wolves or fierce dogs (Apuleius, *Met.* 8.15–17, 9.36), and bridges in states of ruinous disrepair (Procopius, *Aed.* 5.5). Winter brought its own difficulties. Not only were avalanches a risk in mountainous regions (Strabo, *Geography* 4.6.6), but all travel slowed to a crawl. When Aelius Aristides set out eagerly in midwinter from Asia Minor, he was impeded first by rain and then by snow before being wholly arrested by sickness; 100 days later, and a shadow of his former self, he finally reached Rome. Under favourable circumstances, the trip should have taken no more than a month (*Sacred Tales*, 2.60–2).

All these hazards encouraged the religiously minded to take precautions. Many consulted the gods on when to travel (Apuleius, *Met.* 2.12–13, 9.8). In response to a question concerning travel to Italy, one oracle in Asia Minor replied with unusual clarity: 'Make not your journey by sea, but travel afoot by the highway' (Lucian, *Alex.* 53, trans. LCL). Dreams would be carefully scrutinized: keys meant travel delays, but quails ambushes by bandits (Artemidorus 3.54; 3.5). Few were so foolhardy as to set out on a journey with the left foot first (Apuleius, *Met.* 1.5; Chrysostom, *In Eph. hom.* 12.3).

Inns

In a system of communication built upon the movement of bodies, hospitality was of crucial importance. Paul's reliance upon the availability of a range of facilities shows the casualness of habitude. For himself, as for others, he requests lodging (Philem. 22; 1 Cor. 16:6–7) and provisions (Rom. 15:23–4; 1 Cor. 16:6). But for those who lacked contacts, there were commercial venues. Inns were typically located a day's journey, or 25 miles, along all the main routes, unless difficult terrain demanded closer placement (Casson 1988: 354). Hostelries were needed not only for the refreshment of travellers, but also for the regular exchange of horses and vehicles. Stops made simply for fresh horses were originally called *mutationes* (changes), whereas overnight stays were termed *mansiones* (rest-stops). By the time of the Theodosian Code, however, these terms were used interchangeably (Chevallier 1976: 185). From one rest-stop to another, two changes seem to have been typical. The Bordeaux pilgrim, for example, records that he covered the 2,221 miles from Bordeaux to Constantinople with 230 changes and 112 rest-stops: an average rate of travel of about 19.8 miles per day. Occasional difficult stretches demanded three or even four changes of equipment a day.

Facilities at *mansiones* varied considerably. Travelling in northern Greece, Lucius complained that his bed, 'besides being a bit too short and missing a leg, was rotten' (Apuleius, *Met.* 1.11; cf. Aelius Aristides, *Sacred Tales* 2.61). Jerome tells us that for the sake of asceticism, Paula, travelling in the Holy Land, refused invitations to lodge at official mansions, choosing instead to put up at what he, perhaps tautologically, terms 'miserable inns' (*Ep.* 108.7, 9, 14; Kleberg 1957: 91–6). But where travellers had a choice in accommodation, quality tended to improve (Plutarch, *Moralia* 532B–C). In Asia Minor, Epictetus suggests that a traveller might be tempted to linger on in a luxurious inn (*Discourses* 2.23.36); and in that same region Aelius Aristides preferred to stay at an inn rather than at the house of a friend (*Or.*

27). Contemporary map-making conventions reflect the understandable desire of travellers to anticipate the quality of lodging. Thus the Peutinger table, a medieval copy of an early Christian map (Dilke 1985: 112–20; Bosio 1983), traces in brilliant colours not only the major roadways and prominent topographical features of the Roman empire but also the type of available facilities at each stopping point and the mileage between them. A four-sided building surrounding a court designates larger, more comfortable facilities; a house with a twin-peaked roof marks a less elaborate inn; a single-peaked cottage indicates the simplest form of accommodation (Casson 1974: 187, 197–218; Bosio 1983). Some sense of typical services is given in an unusual inscription consisting of a short dialogue between a departing traveller and the innkeeper:

‘Innkeeper, let’s settle up.’

‘One measure of wine and bread: 1 as [a small coin]; some stew: 2 ases.’

‘Fine.’

‘A girl: 8 ases.’

‘That’s fine too.’

‘Hay for the mule: 2 ases.’

‘That animal will be the end of me.’

(CIL 9.2689; Chevallier 1976: 191)

The fee for ‘a girl’ brings us to the reputation of inns as places of prostitution, a fact bemoaned by churchmen. When writing to dissuade Christians from embarking on pilgrimages, Gregory of Nyssa thus sternly warns that ‘the inns and hostelries and cities of the East present many examples of license and indifference to vice’ (*Or.* 2; c.f. Pliny, *NH* 36.5; Ulpian, *Digesta* 3.2.4.2; 23.2.43.1 and 9; *Theodosian Code* 4.56.3). But the association of inns and prostitution is still taken utterly for granted in the sixth-century *Life* of Theodore of Sykeon (*Encomium in S. Theodorum Siceotam* 3). For this reason, churches and monasteries often founded hospices for travellers (Basil, *Ep.* 94; Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 43.63; Palladius, *Lausiaca History* 7).

When on the road, most people preferred to stay with an acquaintance. For this reason, travellers were often provided with letters of reference enabling them to knock on the door of friends of friends or other members of their guild or profession (Rom. 16:10–12; 1 Cor. 16.11; cf. 2 Cor. 7:15; Apuleius, *Met.* 1.21–3; 10.1; Llewellyn 1998: 169–72). Paul was apparently not the only itinerant Christian to stay with Gaius at Corinth as the apostle styles him, ‘host to me and to the whole church’ (Rom. 16:23). Hospitality was an important means of extending one’s social network. The record of people who stayed with Jerome in his monastery on the Mount of Olives constitutes a virtual *Who’s Who* of the late fourth century Christian world (Clark 1992: 28–33).

Tolls

Occurring with even more regularity than inns, were tollbooths and customs offices. Along the roads and at every bridge travellers would have to pay a fee for their use of the facilities, with the proceeds going into a fund for maintenance (Forbes 1955: 152). At the borders of provinces as well as city gates, taxes were due on all

transported goods (Chevallier 1976: 195–7). The amount varied according to province. Some taxed goods at various rates; others charged a flat percentage (from 2.5 to 5 per cent). In a small village in Egypt, a man transporting six measures of lentils on two donkeys in 190 CE owed 3 per cent in customs tax (Oxford, *P. Grenf.* II 50 h, cited by Hopkins 1991). Another inscription, however, suggests that this tax varied according to rank (*OGIS* 674; Ramsay 1904: 394–6). Tariffs for courtesans were apparently particularly punitive, a fact that Philostratus humorously exploits in his *Life* of Apollonius of Tyana. When this first-century itinerant sage and wonder-worker came to a bridge crossing into Mesopotamia, he was asked by an official what he had to declare. Loftily, he replied:

‘I export moderation, righteousness, virtue, continence, courage, discipline’ – thereby stringing together a number of female names. [The tax-collector] scenting profit for himself, said, ‘Register these slaves.’ But [Apollonius] replied, ‘Impossible! For these are not slaves that I am taking out of the country but masters.’

(*Vita Apollonii* 1.20)

While making jokes at the expense of a customs official is seldom in the best interests of a traveller, we are not told whether Apollonius’ wit caused him unnecessary delay.

Sea travel

Compared to the grinding tedium of travel overland, travel by water, if the winds were favourable, seemed almost miraculously swift. Thus, while the Greeks had many words for the sea, their favourite term was *pontos*, a word which never entirely severed its connotation of a bridge.

Travel by sea, as by land, remained largely determined by the necessities of business. As there were no dedicated passenger boats, those wishing to travel by sea booked passage aboard merchant vessels (see Figure 18.7) destined, ideally, for the same port. Passengers desiring to go from Rome to Alexandria were the most fortunate. The capital city’s constant need for wheat ensured a steady stream of huge cargo ships. These freighters offered no special amenities for travellers, but did typically make better time. Less-frequented destinations, however, as with air travel today, made several layovers and the use of progressively smaller vessels inevitable. A passenger heading to Palestine from Rome was thus well advised to board a grain ship for Alexandria and proceed from there to Palestine (Philo, *In Flaccum* 5.26).

Unlike the mobile warships which were constructed like oversized racing shells, merchant ships were built to maximize cargo space. They were broad in the beam and difficult to manoeuvre (Casson 1971: 169–70). A spread of canvas, made out of flax (Pliny, *NH.* 19.1.3–4), provided their only means of locomotion. In periods of calm, they would simply drop anchor and wait for the wind to pick up, as Plautus well knew when he described a couple of dawdlers as ‘slower than corbitas on a calm sea’ (*Poenulus* 507). To modern eyes, their spread of sail was insufficient for their size (Casson 1988: 359). A three-sail rig (a main sail, topsail and forward bowsprit sail or *artemon*) was standard throughout the ancient world for all but the largest ships,



Figure 18.7 A relief on the mausoleum of C. Munatius Faustus (50 CE) of a typical Roman merchant ship with crew members reefing the sails to enter port. Photo Erich Lessing, Art Resource, New York City.

which added a square mizzen on the afterdeck. Without fore-and-aft rigging, moreover, these boats were unable to take efficient advantage of winds blowing from any direction other than behind. During the summer months when the sea was open for travel, strong winds, the so-called ‘yearly’ or ‘etesian’ winds, blew steadily from the north-west. The run from Rome to Alexandria was thus relatively speedy, with two weeks being average. The return voyage, however, was a labourious affair. Instead of striking out across the Mediterranean, these boats would skirt the coast of Roman Palestine until they could cross on the leeward side of the island of Rhodes; from there, they sailed to Fair Havens Harbour on Crete, before striking across to Malta and on to Sicily; only then could they make their way up the western side of Italy into the harbour at Puteoli or Ostia (Ramsay 1904: 379–81). This circuitous route usually took about two months, but might take longer. When Gregory Nazianzen sailed from Alexandria to Greece, he reached Rhodes only on the twentieth day (*Or.* 18.31). Even with a favourable wind, ancient ships probably averaged no more than 4–6 knots, and against the wind, half of that or less.

When the wind blew from the side but from a point somewhat ahead, the square-rigged ships of antiquity could still make some headway by tacking, or tracing a

zigzag course through the water, which allowed the ship to take the wind on one bow and then the other (Casson 1988: 357). To be effective, the transition from one direction to another needed to be as abrupt as possible, a procedure that could alarm passengers unfamiliar with the technique. Synesius, a fourth-century bishop of Cyrene, was thus certain that the ship's captain had lost his mind when he began to tack against the prevailing north-westerly winds (*Ep.* 4).

Unlike modern sailing craft, which are more at risk when sailing close to land, ancient ships were most vulnerable on the open sea. Sudden strong gusts of wind brought pressure to bear on the huge central sail, causing the central mast to work like a giant lever and splinter the ship's hull (Ramsay 1904: 399). To counteract this danger, ingenious reefing techniques were developed. Lines running from the deck up through rings, or 'brails', attached at regular intervals to the sails, allowed the canvas to be shortened rapidly, like some large venetian blind, provided, of course, that the ropes ran smoothly and did not jam in the pulley-blocks (Synesius, *Ep.* 4).

The famous description of the storm at sea in Acts 27 vividly traces the steps taken to avoid shipwreck. In the grip of a rising wind, the captain tries to face into the storm. When he loses control, he orders the sails reefed and allows the boat to be driven by the wind. As the storm worsens, the crew begins to throw surplus cargo overboard, on the third day, jettisoning even the ship's tackle. Without sight of sun or stars and caught in a tempest, despair seizes the travellers. On the fourteenth day, as the ship drifts in the Adriatic, the sailors take soundings and discover that the boat is heading into shore. Immediately they let out four anchors from the stern. Other sailors, fearing that the ship is about to run onto rocks, surreptitiously lower the lifeboat while pretending to cast anchors from the bow. Towards day, the crew lightens the ship further by casting its cargo of wheat into the sea. As day dawns, the shore appears. The crew then cuts the anchors loose and hoists the foresail to head towards the beach. Striking a shoal, the ship runs aground. With the bow firmly stuck, the stern is broken up by the surf. But all the passengers and crew escape safely either by swimming to shore or riding in on planks or other flotsam. The passengers in Achilles Tatius' romance, *The Story of Leucippe and Cleitophon*, were not so lucky. As passengers and crew fight bitterly over places in the one small lifeboat, many drown impaled on spars or dashed upon the rocks (3.3.1–5.5).

The use of anchors in the Acts narrative is particularly instructive. Underwater archeology has discovered a contemporary Roman ship that went down off the coast of Taranto; it had thrown out five anchors, each weighing over 600 kilograms. These were made mostly of wood weighted down with iron fittings. Surviving specimens of ancient anchors reveal, not surprisingly, a poignant blend of practicality and fervent prayer. The stocks, or cross bars, are often inscribed with the names of gods or, occasionally, knucklebones, the ancient equivalent of (furry) dice (Casson 1971: 250–7). The associations of trustworthy stability made the anchor a popular symbol for signet rings which were used to secure valuables at home (Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 3.11).

Aside from storms and the inevitable bouts of seasickness (Oldelehr 1977), travellers by sea braved the threat of pirates (Achilles Tatius 5.7) and the scarcely less fearful rapacity of legendary sea-creatures (Herodotus, *Historia* 6.44.3). Such dangers encouraged even more superstition than travel by land (Macrobius, *Saturnalia*

1.16.18; Artemidorus 2.23; 2.12; 2.17; 3.65; 3.38; Polyaeus 3.10.2; cf. Plutarch, *Themistocles* 13.3; Cicero, *De Divinatione* 2.4.84; Petronius, *Satyricon* 103–5).

To book passage on a ship, an ancient traveller headed down to the port. In most harbours, would-be passengers simply walked the quays asking where ships were bound, as Libanius did in 340 CE, when looking for passage from Constantinople to Athens (*Or.* 1.31). In Rome's great port city of Ostia, however, a square directly inland from the harbour held the offices of all the merchants plying trade overseas. A prospective traveller might simply make a round of the square to book passage on any ship (Casson 1988: 361). Boats were distinguished not by name but by an image painted or modelled in relief just under the bow on either side. They also varied in colour (Pliny, *HN* 35.31; 49; Philostratus, *Imagines* 1.19.3; Casson 1971: 211–12).

Ships did not sail on a schedule; they waited for a favourable wind. Passengers were thus also compelled to hang about the waterfront (Augustine, *Conf.* 5.8), until a herald announced their ship's departure (Philostratus, *V. Apoll.* 8.14). Gangways and ladders were used for boarding. Once aboard, space for passengers was limited. The largest of the grain ships might take on 600 passengers (Josephus, *Life* 15). On Paul's ship to Rome, there were 276 people in all (Acts 27:37), of which perhaps 260 were passengers. But this ship was sailing in the off-season and might not have been at capacity. Synesius tells us that he travelled with about fifty other passengers, a third of whom were women. From him also we hear that most of the ship's crew were Jewish (*Ep.* 4). Aside from the captain, there were other specialized officers: usually a first mate and purser, as well as those in charge of the cargo. These officers, as well as the rest of the crew, might well be slaves (Casson 1971: 314–21).

As the hold was mostly reserved for cargo, ballast (often sand but sometimes edible produce like lentils), and dunnage (packing material designed to protect fragile cargo such as building slates or jars of wine or olive oil), there was limited room for passengers below board. A few might travel down by the bilge water in the ancient equivalent of steerage. Lucian's characters describe these quarters as so cramped and uncomfortable that they were fit only for criminals (*Juppiter Tragoedus* 48; cf. Athenaeus 5.207f.). Most passengers camped out on the open deck, either setting up temporary shelters or simply rolling out bedding (Achilles Tatius, 2.33.1; Petronius, *Sat.* 100.6; Lucian, *Toxaris* 20; Pachomius, *Regula* 119). Well-to-do travellers brought on board an impressive panoply of creature comforts with a corps of servants to deploy them. An elite few might enjoy the greater comforts afforded by the one permanent cabin on deck, where the owner or his agent, the captain, and a few select guests might travel, as it were, in first class (Achilles Tatius, 5.15.3). But for the majority, few amenities were available. Fresh drinking water was provided from a special tank, lined with waterproof fabric, located either in the hold or on deck (Casson 1971: 177). While storage on deck was more convenient, it was also more risky. Gregory Nazianzen describes the helpless dismay felt by passengers witnessing their loss of potable water: 'While the ship was heaving, the receptacle which held our treasured supply of sweet water was smashed and its contents dispersed in the sea' (*Poemata de seipso* 11.145–7). In boats equipped with a galley, passengers might avail themselves of its facilities once the crew had been fed (Van Doorninck 1972: 137–44). The only other available facility may have been a latrine, as some relief sculptures show a small covered structure perched over the water on

the stern directly behind the steering apparatus (Casson 1971: 180), but this is only a guess.

Roman engineers, having discovered a kind of concrete capable of setting under water, were able to construct breakwaters and thus ensure calm harbours. In Alexandria, the first lighthouse was erected to such acclaim that it became one of the seven wonders of the world. Like all subsequent lighthouses in antiquity, it served to guide boats into the harbour rather than to warn them of dangerous rocks or reefs (Casson 1988: 362). Once inside the breakwater, tug boats guided large ships into shore where they were made fast to massive stones set into the quays. Cargo and passengers travelling further inland might then re-embark on smaller vessels designed to travel along rivers, as did the Lady Poemenia (Palladius, *Lausiac History* 35; Hunt 1982: 76–7). Travelling upstream on rivers such as the Danube, Rhône and Seine, often demanded towing, usually by humans but sometimes by animals. For this reason, towpaths were a common feature running along both sides of the river banks. For smaller boats plying along the coast, two versions of the fore-and-aft rig were known: the spritsail and lateen. Running parallel to the keel, these sails could make efficient use of winds blowing from ahead.

Travel by sea, potentially so swift, was available only part of the year. From 10 November until 10 March, the sea was ‘closed’. Perfectly safe navigation, however, was further confined to the period from 26 May to 14 September. Paul urged the sailors to put up for the winter in Crete, because ‘the fast’ (i.e. Yom Kippur) had already passed, bringing an end to the safe sailing period (Acts 27:9). During the winter season, only vessels constrained by need, such as the Roman grain ships and military craft, plied the waters (Rougé 1966: 32–3). The sea was closed not only because of the real risk of storms but also because of increased cloud cover (Casson 1988: 357). With the stars obscured, navigation was impossible on the open sea. The long days of summer were also welcome in harbour, allowing for more efficient loading and unloading of cargo.

LETTER-WRITING

Wherever people travelled, they brought news. Coming into town, merchants were typically surrounded by townspeople eager for news (Caesar, *Bellum Gallicum* 4.5; cf. Livy 42.4). In return for hospitality, guests were expected to regale their hosts with information, including news about their ‘native country, its leading men and governor’ (Apuleius, *Met.* 1.26). If one could not travel oneself, a letter was certainly the next best thing. Seneca’s sentiments were no doubt widely shared, when he wrote to his friend Lucilius: ‘I never receive a letter from you without being in your company forthwith . . . For that which is sweetest when we meet face to face is afforded by the impress of a friend’s hand upon his letter – recognition’ (*Epistles* 40.1, trans. LCL). Jerome was later to confess that he was unable to estimate the number of letters he had sent his friend Paula, since he wrote to her every day (*De viris illustribus* 135). From its very beginning, Christianity was a movement of letter-writers (Stowers 1986: 15). More than nine thousand letters written by Christians in antiquity have come down to us.

Some of these are official. When the emperor, for example, wished to summon bishops to a council, he did so by letter (Jerome, *Ep.* 108.6). Others used letters to rally empire-wide support for disputes that might have otherwise remained purely local. When the fourth-century priest Arius, for example, found himself in bitter disagreement with his bishop, he sent letters describing the quarrel throughout the Eastern empire. Having already called a council that excommunicated Arius, bishop Alexander wrote to all his fellow bishops condemning the priest's position. Thus with an exchange of letters, the Arian controversy began (Stowers 1986: 46–7).

Most letters, however, were concerned with familial or business matters. Some, for all their terseness, are remarkably poignant, as when a woman in Syria wrote to her aunt in Koptos, Egypt:

Know my lady, that since Easter my mother, your sister has been dead. When I had my mother with me, she was my whole family. Since she died, I have remained alone, having no one in a foreign land. Remember then, aunt, as if my mother were living, to write to me if you find someone (to bring the letter).

(P. Bour. 25 = Naldini 78 [4c], trans. Bagnall 1993: 205)

To send such missives one did not need to be literate. If the reading-and-writing population of Late antiquity was never more than 20 per cent, and may often have been considerably less, people were nevertheless able to access writing and reading skills to meet their needs (Hopkins 1991). A technical skill among others, it may have been no more difficult to find someone able to write a letter than to sew a piece of clothing.

People to carry letters were essential to the system. Anyone travelling in the right direction might be pressed into service, or provide an occasion for the writing of a letter (White 1986: 215ff.; Llewelyn 1994: 26–9). We gather that it was not difficult to find a courier from the frequent accusations of failure to write. When an expected message was delayed, people assumed that it had not been written rather than that a courier had been unavailable (Llewelyn 1994: 27–9). In this third-century letter, the reason is clear: 'For many Oxyrhynchites are here. I blame you that you have not yet replied to me' (*P. Oxy* XXXI 2595, trans. Llewelyn 1994: 28). The presence of large number of expatriates is understood as ensuring a regular stream of people travelling between the two locations, any one of which, presumably, would be willing to serve as a courier. But the ideal courier was someone known to the writer who could be relied upon if needed to amplify the message. 'Write word to us,' a third-century letter enjoins, 'if one of our people sails down' (*BGU* XIV 2417, in Llewelyn 1994: 26, 29). Thus Paul sent his letters via associates he trusted would be able to extend his teachings; Timothy and Titus were couriers to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:17; 2 Cor. 8:16–24; 9:3–5), Epaphroditus to the Philippians (Phil. 2:25–30), and Tychicus to the Ephesians (Eph. 6:21–2; Doty 1973: 45–6; Thompson 1998: 65–8). To Burrus, his companion and secretary, Ignatius entrusted two of his missives (*Epistle to the Philadelphians* 11.2; *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* 12.1; Llewelyn 1994: 51–7).

Not all couriers were so reliable. Some letters were never delivered. Among these were the always problematic ones that accompanied money (Llewelyn 1994: 28–9). But couriers might simply be unable to locate the addressee. Letters might include

written directions, but more often simply bore the name of the intended recipient (Llewelyn 1994: 29–43). No doubt delivery instructions were usually given orally, as when Ananias was told: ‘Go to the street called Straight and inquire in the house of Judas for a man of Tarsus named Paul’ (Acts 9:11). Other missives were intentionally delivered to the wrong person. When Jerome entrusted Pammachius with a letter of reconciliation for Rufinus in Rome, Pammachius delivered instead a vitriolic missive intended for the privileged eyes of Jerome’s close friends (*Ep.* 84 instead of *Ep.* 81; Clark 1992: 27–8). In this system, privacy was not guaranteed at any level. Jerome complains that a ‘pretended monk’ illicitly obtained and falsely delivered one of his letters (*Ep.* 57.2; Clark 1992: 32).

Recorded times for the delivery of letters vary widely. The time of year was a crucial factor, as letters might take twice as long in delivery during the worst season for travelling than during the best (cf. Basil, *Ep.* 48). Yet even under the most favourable conditions, delays were not atypical. The demands of other business might produce a circuitous route, as when a letter from Puteoli, south of Rome, went via Alexandria to Tyre in North Africa. In order to ensure that the government had access to a reliable, steady flow of information, the emperor Augustus developed the *cursus publicus*. At first, a series of runners brought the news, but this system was quite quickly abandoned in favour of a relay of vehicles. The latter system, in which a single courier travelled the whole distance on a series of light wagons, ferries, and sailing ships sacrificed speed for the sake of the more detailed information provided by a messenger who could be questioned (Suetonius, *Augustus* 49.3). This ‘public route’ is also known as the Roman Imperial Post.

The average speed of the post was perhaps five Roman miles an hour. In a day, a messenger travelled about fifty Roman miles or seventy-five kilometres (Procopius, *Historia Arcana* 30.3; Ramsay 1904: 387–8; Chevallier 1976: 194; Forbes 1955: 154). In a pinch, dispatch bearers occasionally covered twice the distance, with 240 kilometres a day being the maximum ever reported. Speed always depended, of course, upon the quality of the road, the density of the traffic, and the season. In general, the post from Rome to Alexandria would have taken about fifty-four days, to Caesaria in Palestine forty-six, to Antioch thirty-nine, to Constantinople twenty-four, and to Brundisium seven (Libanius, *Or.* 21. 15–16; Chevallier 1976: 193).

Only designated officials had the right to use this relay system (Llewelyn 1995); to prove entitlement, they were required to carry a letter, or *diploma*, sealed by the governor of the province, authenticating their rightful business and stipulating the type of transport to which they were entitled. Each year, a stack of *diplomas* was sent to every governor’s office by the imperial chancellery, which the governor, or his designated official, could then use to transmit important information: one subject per letter (Chevallier 1976: 182). These certificates were inscribed on bronze, papyrus or parchment tablets that were then attached either to the messenger’s vehicle or the horse’s neck. Official messengers would also be granted a letter of credit (*evectio*) stating the supplies he might requisition from each station, of which the most important remained the driver who was responsible for taking the team on to the next relay and returning with the vehicle (Forbes 1955: 153–4). Other services included a farrier to reshoe animals, cartwrights to repair vehicles damaged by jolting, a veterinary surgeon, an official (*manceps* or *stationarius*) to keep the books

and ensure that the messenger was entitled to use the system, and a staff of scribes (*actuarii, numerarii*). Finally, in places of strategic importance, there might also be stationed a company of troops assigned to serve the postal service as dispatch bearers and road police, as well as a standing guard over army supplies (*It. Eg.* 7.2, 9.3; *Theodosian Code* 8.5.38). While penalties attached to those found abusing the system, by granting diplomas to their friends or transacting their own private business, epigraphic evidence suggests that fraud was common (Chevallier 1976: 182–4, 188; Forbes 1955: 153). Chrysostom knew that the elite were likely to make use of the *cursus* a condition for their travel; thus would they greet a summons to the Imperial city:

Unless you give us carriages and soft bedding, we cannot come; nor can we come unless we have many attendants and are allowed to rest continually. And we will come only then if we have the use of beasts of burden and travel for just a small portion of the day – and there are many other things we need as well.

(*In Heb. homiliae* 2.5 [PG 63.261])

CONCLUSION

Thus, despite rates that strike us as impossibly slow and fraught with danger and delays, travel and communication were swifter and more readily effected in the early Christian period than at any previous time. If the desire to communicate prompted people to travel vast distances in the early Christian world, the realities of travel, in turn, informed all communication. We see this perhaps most clearly in the widespread use of metaphors drawn from travel. Common concerns over impassable routes and potential incursions by bandits thus inform Augustine's comparison of Neoplatonism and Christianity:

It is one thing to see from a wooded mountain peak the land of peace, but to find no route to it, and to struggle in vain towards it by impassable ways, ambushed and beset by fugitives and deserters, under their leader, the lion and the dragon. It is a different thing to keep to the road that leads to that land, guarded by the protection of the heavenly commander, where no deserters from the heavenly army lie in wait like bandits.

(*Conf.* 7.21; cf. Tertullian, *De resurrectione carnis* 43)

In a similar vein, Chrysostom compares the life of virginity to a ship on the high sea and thus easy prey for pirates (*De virginitate* 24.2). His praise of monastic life depends upon an appreciation of antiquity's admiration for lighthouses:

There is a calm port. [Monks] are like beacons sending forth their light from a high point to those sailing in from afar. Stationed in the harbour, drawing all people to their own tranquillity, they preserve from shipwreck those who look to them.

(*In 1 Tim. homiliae* 14.3 [PG 62.575])

Thus travel and communication were inextricably entwined. All our sources suggest

that early Christians believed that they lived in a time of exceptional mobility. But we know what they could not — namely, that this ease of travel would not be surpassed until the age of the steam engine.

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WORSHIP, PRACTICE AND BELIEF



Maxwell E. Johnson

Early Christian worship, practice and belief is a topic of enormous complexity as contemporary liturgical scholarship has come to realize that Christian worship is diverse in its origins, multilinear in its development, and closely related to the several cultural, linguistic, geographical, and theological expressions and orientations of distinct churches throughout the early Christian world (Bradshaw 1992) (see Figure 19.1). Hence, the practices and interpretations of worship throughout the first centuries of the common era were quite different depending upon where specific practices are to be located. Similarly, these early differences would result, especially during the great formative period of the fourth and fifth centuries, in the distinct liturgical ‘rites’ of East and West, distinct ‘styles of Christian living’ (Kavanagh 1984: 100), which still characterize the make-up of Christianity today (see Figure 19.2).

This chapter focuses on the principal liturgical acts of and occasions for worship where such diversity in practice and theological interpretation was most apparent; namely, in the rites of Christian initiation, the Eucharist, daily prayer, and the liturgical year. Because of important changes in liturgical practice after the Council of Nicaea (325 CE), this chapter is organized into two major sections: first, ‘Worship, Practice and Belief Before the Council of Nicaea’, where what evidence there is for these rites is surveyed; and, second, ‘Worship, Practice and Belief from the Council of Nicaea to the Death of Augustine of Hippo’, where the further evolution and interpretation of these practices are discussed.

WORSHIP, PRACTICE AND BELIEF BEFORE THE COUNCIL OF NICEA

Initiation

Based on Jesus’ baptism by John (Matt. 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–2; John 1:31–4), possibly on Jesus’ own baptismal practice (John 3:22, 26; 4:1), and in general continuity with the overall context of ritual washings and bathing customs within first-century Judaism (Collins 1995: 35–47; Lathrop 1994: 23–31), new converts to Christianity, at least from the first Pentecost for the Christ-movement

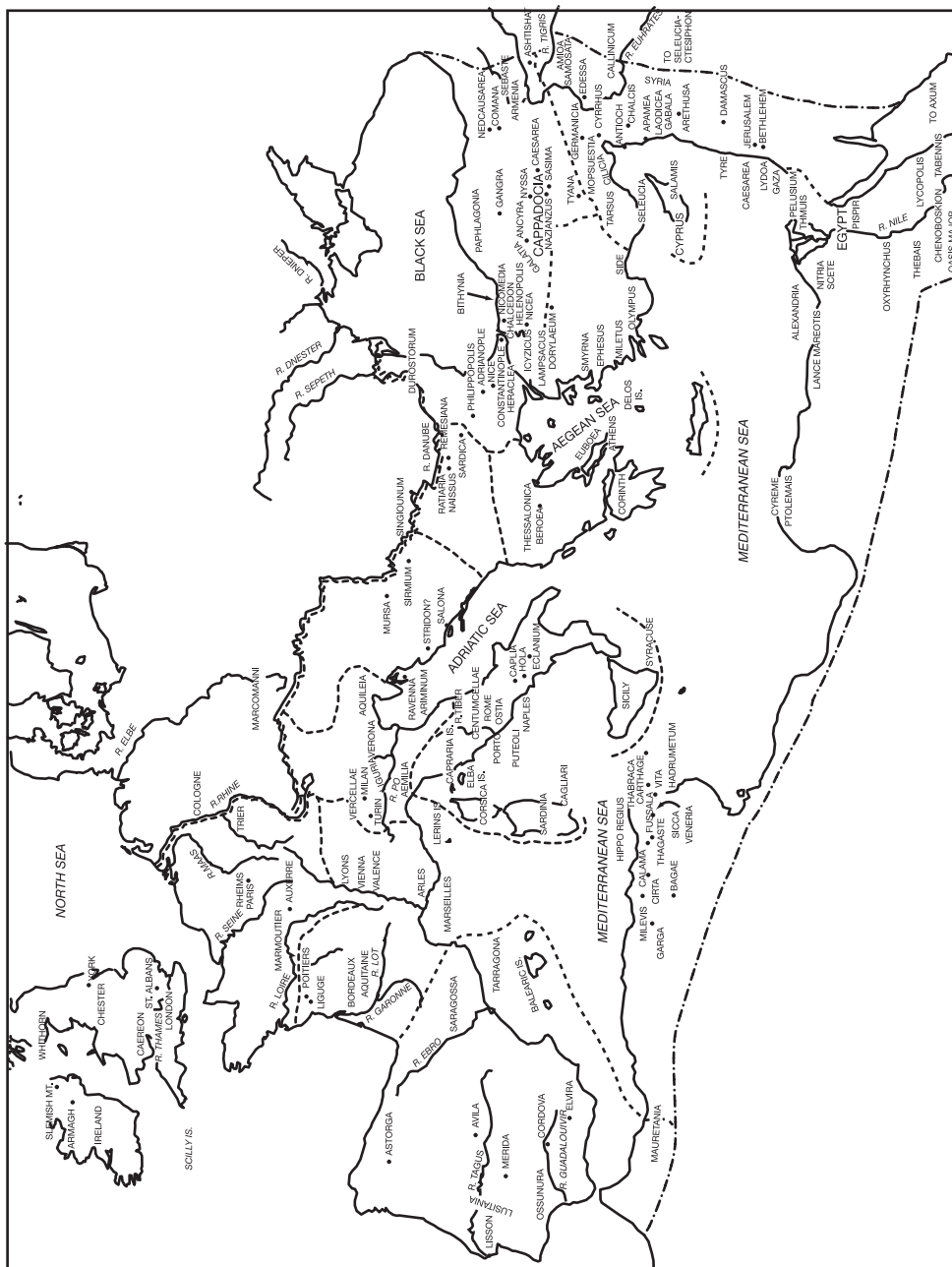


Figure 19.1 The Christian world in the fourth century CE. Copyright SPCK.

*Rites of the Eastern Churches**

Byzantine Armenian West Syrian Maronite East Syrian Coptic Ethiopic

Rites of the Western Churches†

Roman North African Ambrosian Gallican
(includes Celtic) Mozarabic

* All seven eastern rites remain living liturgical traditions today among Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic churches.

† Along with the Roman rite, the Ambrosian (Archdiocese of Milan, Italy) and Mozarabic (Toledo, Spain) remain living liturgical traditions today.

Figure 19.2 Classical liturgical rites of East and West.

onwards (Acts 2:38–42), were initiated into Christ and the Church by a ritual process which included some form of ‘baptism’ with water, a process that eventually will be based in the command of the risen Jesus (Matt. 28:19). Unfortunately, the New Testament itself records little detail about this baptismal practice or what additional ceremonies may have been included. While we might assume that some kind of profession of faith in Jesus as Lord was present, we do not know if any particular ‘formula’ – for example, ‘I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ from the dominical command for baptism in Matt 28:19 or, ‘in the name of Jesus’ (Acts 3:6) – was employed. Nor do we know precisely *how* baptisms were regularly conferred (by immersion, complete submersion, or pouring [Stauffer 1994: 57–65]), whether infants were ever candidates for baptism in the New Testament period, what kind of preparation may have preceded adult baptism, whether anointings were already part of the process, or if occasional references to the apostolic conferral of the postbaptismal gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8 and 19) were regular features of baptismal practice in some early communities or exceptional cases due to particular situations. For that matter, in a recent study of footwashing in the Gospel of John it has even been suggested that among some early Johannine communities it was not baptism at all but a footwashing ceremony that constituted the ‘rite’ of Christian initiation (Connell 1996: 20–30).

What the New Testament does provide is a rich mosaic of baptismal images,¹ two of which will stand out with particular emphasis: Christian initiation as new birth through water and the Holy Spirit (John 3:5ff.) and Christian initiation as being united with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:3–11). Around these, several of the other New Testament images will eventually cluster as specific baptismal ‘ceremonies’.

Our earliest extra-biblical sources for the rites of Christian initiation provide only a few more, albeit important, details. Chapter 7 of the (probably Syrian) late first- or early second-century proto-church order called the *Didache* directs that, after instruction (presumably the kind of ethical formation supplied by chapters 1–6 of

the document) and one or two days of fasting on the part of the candidates, baptizers, and community alike, baptism is to be conferred in cold running (i.e., 'living') water. The *Didache* instructs that if neither cold nor warm running water is available, then water is to be poured over the head of the candidate, accompanied by the Trinitarian formula of Matt. 28:19. Only the baptized, we are instructed further in chapter 9, are to receive the Eucharist.

In the middle of the second century at Rome, chapters 61 and 65 of the *First Apology* of Justin Martyr not only corroborate the information provided by the *Didache* but add some other elements:

[*Chapter 61*]: those who believe in the truth of our teachings and discourses promise that they can live in accordance with it. Then they are taught to pray and, while fasting, to ask God for the forgiveness of their past sins. We, for our part, pray and fast with them . . . Next, we bring them to a place where there is water, and they are reborn in the same way as we ourselves were reborn before them. That is to say, they are cleansed with water in the name of God the Father and Master of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit. For Christ said: 'Unless you are born again, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven' . . . Upon the person who wishes to be reborn and who repents of his sins, we invoke the name of God the Father and Master of the universe . . . We call this washing an 'enlightenment', because those who are taught as we have described have their minds enlightened . . . (We also invoke) upon the person who is enlightened and cleansed the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and the name of the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets foretold the entire story of Jesus.

[*Chapter 65*]: After we have thus cleansed the person who believes and has joined our ranks, we lead him in to where those we call 'brothers' are assembled. We offer prayers in common for ourselves, for him who has just been enlightened, and for all . . . everywhere . . . When we finish praying, we greet one another with a kiss. Then bread and a cup of wine mixed with water are brought to him who presides over the brethren.

(Deiss 1979: 91–2)

Because Justin refers in the above description to what may be called 'credal' language, it is not clear if a baptismal formula is intended or if he is alluding to an early example of the *western* threefold profession of faith as constituting the 'formula' of baptism. At the same time, while it is often assumed that Justin describes *Roman* liturgical practice, his theology of baptism as 'new birth' and his reference to baptism as 'enlightenment', characteristic emphases in the Christian East, may reflect an *eastern* Christian tradition (Justin, after all, was from Flavia Neapolis in Syria) or, possibly, that of a Syrian community at Rome. Nevertheless, the overall ritual pattern described by him underscores that some kind of prebaptismal 'catechesis' (instruction) preceded baptism and that this entire process of becoming a Christian culminated in the sharing in the prayers, kiss, and Eucharist of the community.

It is only in the early third century that a more complete picture of the variant processes of early Christian initiation begins to emerge. Here, we begin to see

detailed evidence of several additional ritual elements. But the extent to which any of these elements are present will vary according to liturgical tradition.

In early Syrian documents – the *Didascalia Apostolorum* and the *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* – a pattern of initiation appears to exist wherein the baptism of Jesus is seen as the primary paradigm for Christian baptism and the theology of baptism flows from the ‘new birth’ focus of John 3. While these documents place minimal stress on catechesis, there is a strong emphasis on a prebaptismal anointing of the head (and, eventually, the whole body), interpreted as a ‘royal’ anointing by which the Holy Spirit assimilates the candidate to the kingship and priesthood of Christ, baptism accompanied by the Matthean Trinitarian formula, and the concluding reception of the Eucharist (Winkler 1982, 1995). It is also possible, but by no means proven, that one of the principal occasions for initiation in the early Syrian tradition was 6 January, the Feast of the Epiphany, interpreted, primarily, as the Feast of Jesus’ baptism (Merras 1994: 164ff.). Several scholars have also suggested that early Egyptian initiation practice provides a close parallel to that of Syria in this time period (Kretschmar 1963; Bradshaw 1988: 5–17; Johnson 1995a: 5–16), although in Egypt it appears that candidates for baptism were enrolled *on* Epiphany and then baptized 40 days later, with catechetical instruction given during a fast associated with Jesus’ own 40-day fast in the wilderness (Talley 1986: 194–213).

Western sources of the third century provide alternative patterns to the early Syrian, and possibly Egyptian, practice. In North Africa, Tertullian’s *De baptismo* (c. 200) describes a ritual process which included ‘frequent’ prebaptismal vigils and fasts, a renunciation of Satan, threefold credal profession of faith in the context of the conferral of baptism, a postbaptismal ‘Christic’ anointing related to priesthood, a handlaying ‘blessing’ associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit, and participation in the Eucharist, which also included the reception of milk and honey as symbols of entering into the ‘promised land’ (Whitaker 1970: 7–10). Tertullian’s description is corroborated generally a little later in North Africa by Cyprian of Carthage (Whitaker 1970: 10–12), and for Rome, presumably, in the *Apostolic Tradition*, c. 215, ascribed to Hippolytus of Rome (Cuming 1976: 15–22).

According to the *Apostolic Tradition*, prebaptismal catechesis was to last for ‘three years’ and included frequent prayer, fasting, and exorcism, with entrance into the ‘catechumenate’ itself accompanied by a detailed interrogation of the motives and lifestyles of those seeking admittance. For those eventually ‘elected’ to baptism, the rites themselves took place at a Saturday night vigil, and consisted of a renunciation of Satan, a full body anointing with the ‘oil of exorcism’, a threefold, credal interrogation accompanied by the three immersions of baptism itself, a postbaptismal anointing by a presbyter with the ‘oil of thanksgiving’, an entrance into the assembly where the bishop performed a hand laying with prayer and a second anointing, and, after the kiss, the sharing of the Eucharist, including the cup(s) of milk and honey referred to by Tertullian. Since authorship, date, provenance, and influence of this church order are all subject to intense scholarly debate today, the details provided by it must be received with due caution. It is possible that several of these elements, e.g., the three-year catechumenate and the episcopal anointing, reflect later (fourth-century) additions or interpolations (Bradshaw 1996a: 3–17). Nevertheless, although the earliest extant text of the *Apostolic Tradition* (mid-fifth

century in Latin) does not interpret the bishop's handlaying prayer and anointing as 'giving' the Holy Spirit, subsequent versions of the document will do precisely that and, at least at Rome, the association of these episcopal acts with the conferral of the Holy Spirit will become a characteristic emphasis.

Along with these specific ritual details, third-century sources also show that infant baptism, including infant communion, was being practised widely. Tertullian strongly cautions against it (*De baptismo* 18). Origen calls it an 'apostolic custom' (*Commentary on Romans* 5.9). The *Apostolic Tradition* makes provision for those 'who cannot answer for themselves' (Cuming 1976: 18). And Cyprian gives a theological defence based on the inheritance of the 'disease of death' from Adam (*Epistle* 64). Similarly, Tertullian is the first author to express a preference for initiation taking place either at Easter or during the 50 days of Easter ('for then was accomplished our Lord's passion, and *into it we are baptized*'; Whitaker 1970: 9). It may be that something similar is intended in the *Apostolic Tradition*, but since this document only refers to initiation at a Saturday night vigil, there is no compelling reason to assume that it is the *Easter* vigil which is meant.

Eucharist

Stemming from Jesus' table companionship with 'tax collectors and sinners' as the celebration of the in-breaking of the eschatological 'reign' or 'kingdom of God', his several feeding miracles, the Synoptic (Matt. 26:26–9; Mark 14: 22–5; Luke 22:14–20) and Pauline (1 Cor. 11:23–6) accounts of his 'Last Supper,' the meal contexts of his post-resurrection appearances (cf. Luke 24 and John 21), and the continued meal customs of the apostolic church (Acts 2:42, 46), the central practice of early Christian worship was the 'breaking of bread', 'Lord's Supper', or 'Eucharist' celebrated in obedience to Jesus' command to 'do this' table ritual as his 'memorial'. Whatever may have constituted the diverse culinary contents of such 'Eucharistic' gatherings early on (bread, wine [or water!], cheese, milk, honey, fruits, and/or fish), or whatever the precise order may have been (McGowan 1995: 551–5), our earliest documents (1 Cor. 11 and *Didache* 9 and 10) confirm that the 'Eucharist' was, initially, a literal meal, held most likely in the evening within a domestic, i.e., 'house-church', setting, with the contents of the meal provided by members of the assembly themselves (see Figures 19.3, 19.4).

By the middle of the second century the 'meal' itself had become an occasional evening service called the *agape* (portrayed in Roman catacomb paintings dated to the second half of the second century CE, as seen in Figure 19.4), with only the specific ritual sharing of bread and cup in the context of praise and thanksgiving now transferred to Sunday morning and remaining as the central focus of worship. Again, it is Justin Martyr, in chapter 67 of his *First Apology*, who provides our earliest overall description of what constituted this Sunday morning worship. According to him, this celebration consisted of:

Assembly

Reading (from the writings of the prophets and 'memoirs' of the apostles, as long as time permitted)

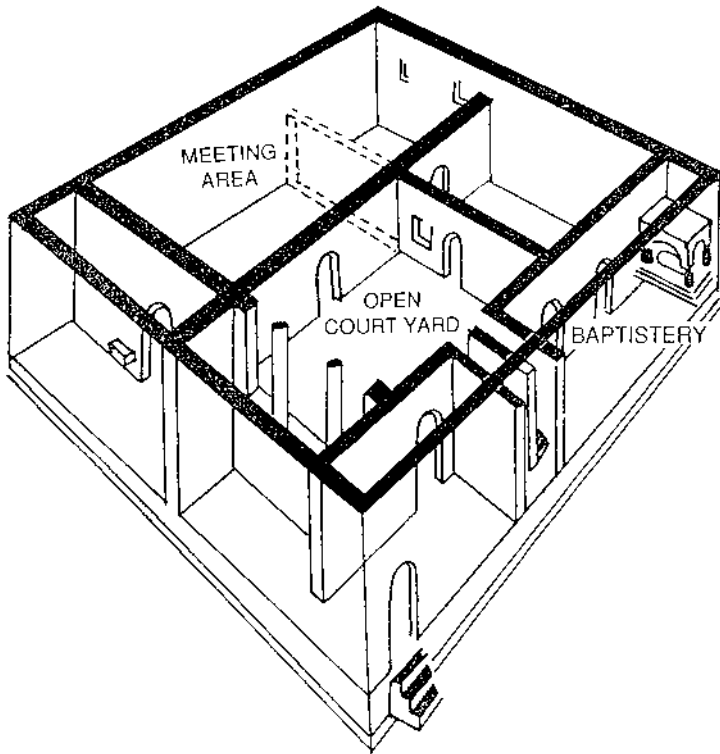


Figure 19.3 Illustration by Armando Garzon-Blanco of the house-church at Dura-Europos, Syria, *c.* 250 CE. From Chiat and Mauck (1991: 101), reproduced with permission from Marchita Mauck and the University of Notre Dame Press.

Exhortation (or Homily) by the ‘president’ (*proestôs*)

Prayers offered in common

Kiss

Presentation of Bread and Mixed Cup (wine and water)

Thanksgiving Prayer over the Bread and Cup (prayed extemporaneously by the president (or *proestôs*) to God, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit)

‘Amen’ by the assembly

Sharing the Meal

(‘Deacons’ take the Eucharistic gifts to the absent)

Collection (for the poor, orphans, and widows)

Whether the ‘Reading’ and ‘Exhortation’ stem from the fusion of a Jewish synagogue-type service with the Eucharistic action or were included as part of the meal setting from the very beginning remains debatable. Nevertheless, the ritual skeleton provided by Justin is discernible in every Christian Eucharistic tradition thereafter.

Although Justin is clear that the ‘Eucharistic Prayer’ or ‘*anaphora*’ (prayer of



Figure 19.4 Fresco of Eucharistic scene from the Catacomb of Saint Callistus, late second century CE. From Wilpert (1903: plate 41.4).²

offering) was extemporized by the presider, some models for this prayer are provided in other documents of the first three centuries. Just as Jewish meal prayers (i.e., the *Birkat ha-mazon*) ‘remembered’ God’s saving acts in history and ‘invoked’ God’s continued presence and the fulfilment of those saving acts, so *anamnesis* (remembrance of Christ) and *epiclesis* (invocation) would come to characterize early Christian Eucharistic praying in texts such as the meal prayers in *Didache* 9 and 10 (Syria), the *Strasbourg Papyrus* (Egypt), that of *Addai and Mari* (Syria), and the anaphora of the *Apostolic Tradition* (for texts, see Jasper and Cuming 1987: 23–4, 53–4, 42–4, 34–6). The anaphora of the *Apostolic Tradition* already includes both a brief ‘narrative of institution’ (i.e., the words of Jesus at the Last Supper) and an explicit *epiclesis* of the Holy Spirit in relationship to the reception of the ‘fruits’ of communion, but other extant anaphoral texts and fragments display no evidence that these elements were a regular feature of early Eucharistic praying. Since it is usually assumed that such elements were not incorporated into the anaphora until the fourth century, it is possible that their presence in the anaphora of the *Apostolic Tradition* are fourth-century additions. Within the first three centuries, then, the institution narrative itself may have functioned as a ‘distribution formula’ at the sharing of communion, or, alternatively, as part of catechesis on the Eucharist (Kilmartin 1974: 268–87).

Whatever the liturgical use of the ‘institution narrative’ may have been, it did not function as a ‘consecration formula’ for the setting apart of the bread and cup. What ‘consecrated’ the bread and wine was the prayer of thanksgiving (*Eucharistia*) itself. Nevertheless, that Christians of the first three centuries understood the Eucharistic bread and wine to be identified in a rather realistic manner with the ‘body’ and ‘blood’ of Christ is also clear. So Ignatius of Antioch (c. 98–117 CE) can refer to the Eucharist as the ‘medicine of immortality’ (*To the Ephesians* 20.2) and can draw a Christological parallel between the incarnation of Christ and the Eucharist, indicat-

ing that certain 'Docetists', who denied the reality of the incarnation, also abstained from the Eucharist because 'they do not acknowledge the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ . . .' (*To the Smyrnaeans* 7.1). Justin Martyr notes that the Eucharist is not 'common bread or common drink' but the 'flesh and blood of [the] incarnate Jesus' (Deiss 1979: 92), and Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 180) asserts that 'the bread . . . when it receives the invocation of God is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, the earthly and the heavenly' (Power 1991: 15). If a short time later, Tertullian can refer to the bread or wine as the '*figura*' (figure) of the body or blood of Christ (*Adversus Marcionem* 4.40), this should not be interpreted as a repudiation of realistic in favour of symbolic language, but within an overall philosophical context where 'symbol' participates in the reality being signified.

Related to this is the early Christian notion of the Eucharistic action as the church's 'sacrifice' or 'offering', an association made as early as *Didache* 14. Viewed as the fulfilment of the 'pure sacrifice' of Mal. 1:11, the earliest interpretation of this 'sacrifice' appears to have been the 'offering' of prayer and thanksgiving as the church's 'bloodless' offering of praise in contradistinction to the 'blood' sacrifices of Judaism and the religions of the Graeco-Roman world. Its relationship to the Eucharist thus had to do with the great '*Eucharistia*', the prayer 'offered' over the bread and cup.

Suggested by the fact that early Christians themselves still brought gifts of bread, wine, and other food to the Eucharist both for Eucharistic use and distribution to the poor, and by a response to gnostic dualism and denial of the overall importance of the material world, the 'Eucharistic sacrifice' came to be seen as somehow embodied in these material 'gifts'. Hence, the anaphora of the *Apostolic Tradition* can refer to the bread and cup as the 'oblations' which the church now 'offers'. At the same time, Cyprian of Carthage draws a parallel between Christ's own sacrifice and that which is offered in the Eucharist by the 'priest' (i.e., bishop), 'who discharges the office of Christ', and states that the latter is done 'in commemoration' of the former (*Epistle* 63.14).

With regard to this, one must proceed cautiously. Recent scholarship has argued that early Eucharistic use of sacrificial terminology was a deliberate attempt to subvert the religious meaning of sacrifice altogether and to assert that the *Christian* sacrifice is no cultic sacrifice at all but the 'offering' of praise and thanksgiving leading to and expressing the priestly life of the community in its ethical service to the poor and in grateful response for God's own gifts (Daly 1978; Lathrop 1993: 139–58). What is 'offered' in the Eucharist, then, 'is what the New Testament has Jesus order us to offer: the memorial of his own self offering' (Taft 1996: 45); that is, the liturgical *doing* of the Eucharist in obedience to his command.

Apart from its common celebration on Sundays it is not clear how often the Eucharist may have been celebrated throughout the first three centuries (Taft 1984: 62). Practice undoubtedly varied from place to place. In some places the Christian fasting days of Wednesdays and Fridays (*Didache* 8) may have concluded with a public service of the Word and the reception of communion from the reserved Eucharist (Alexandria) or became occasions for the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy itself (North Africa). Occasional celebrations in cemeteries, at the tombs of

the martyrs, in homes, prisons, and elsewhere are known to have become so common in North Africa that by the middle of the third century Cyprian can refer to a 'daily' celebration at Carthage. And local expansions of liturgical calendars from the end of the second century on, to include the 'anniversary' days of martyrs' deaths, also contributed to a growing Eucharistic frequency in the early churches. There is also concrete evidence (Tertullian, *Ad uxorem* 2.5) that Christians regularly took enough of the Eucharistic elements home with them each Sunday in order to be able to receive communion at other times during the week, a practice that would persist for several centuries both among the laity and within monastic circles.

Daily prayer

Christians of the first three centuries, whether in private, with family members, or in small gatherings, also knew a regular pattern of prayer at several intervals throughout the day. Again, however, there is no single pattern which can be taken as universally normative. Rather, the New Testament mandates to 'pray always' (1 Thess. 5:17) and to 'sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God' (Col. 3:17) resulted in various patterns within the early Christian communities. *Didache* 8, for example, directs that Christians are to pray the 'Our Father' three times each day. Other sources (Clement of Alexandria and Origen) also know a threefold daily pattern (morning, noon, and evening, with an additional period during the night), others (Tertullian) emphasize a twofold pattern of morning and evening as 'official' or 'statutory' prayers ('*legitimae orationes*'), and still others (e.g., the *Apostolic Tradition*) know an 'horarium' which consists of a fivefold pattern: morning, third hour, sixth hour (noon), ninth hour, and evening, with an additional period during the night. In addition to this, the *Apostolic Tradition* also refers to morning assemblies for 'instruction' and evening gatherings for the communal *agape*.

Traditional scholarship sought to demonstrate that daily morning and evening prayer were 'public' liturgical gatherings in direct continuity with Jewish synagogue practice, with prayer at the third, sixth, and ninth hours added as 'private' occasions (Dugmore 1964). Recent research, however, has shown that Jewish patterns of prayer were themselves also quite diverse and that the most that can be said of the relationship is that both Jews and Christians prayed at fixed times (Taft 1986a: 3–11). If any pattern is the 'original' Christian practice, it is probably the threefold one, but this was organized differently within the early communities. In some places the pattern was correlated with the natural divisions of the day (morning, noon, and evening) and in others in relationship to the divisions of the work day throughout the Roman empire (i.e., at the third, sixth [noon], and ninth hours). What sources like the *Apostolic Tradition* demonstrate, therefore, is probably a conflation or synthesis of these two threefold patterns to form the 'classic' horarium known as the 'liturgy of the hours' (Bradshaw 1996b: 70).

Unfortunately, we know very little about the contents of daily prayer in the first three centuries, though we can certainly assume that psalms, readings from Scripture, and hymns were frequently used. It is possible that Psalm 141, with its reference to the 'evening sacrifice' (Ps. 141:2), was already a regular feature of evening prayer (at least in Egypt), but this is not known with certainty (Johnson

1995a: 40–2). Rather than emphasizing specific contents, from early on the principal focus of prayer at these fixed intervals was seen as an expression of eschatological watchfulness and readiness (cf. Col. 4:2 and Eph. 6:18), an expectant and continual ‘vigil’ (cf. Matt. 25:1–13; Mark 14:32–7; Luke 12:35–48) for the imminent return of the Lord (Taft 1986a: 15ff.). Together with this, and ultimately replacing it in overall emphasis, daily prayer, like the Eucharist itself, came to be seen as part of the spiritual ‘sacrifice of praise’ expressing the self-offering of Christians in their lives of service to God. Perhaps the way in which Christians are depicted in the Roman catacombs, standing with their arms extended (see Figure 19.5), expresses something of this self-offering.

Liturgical year

Sunday is the original Christian *feast*, and, although the precise relationship between Sunday and the Jewish Sabbath remains a subject of scholarly debate for the New Testament and earliest periods of history (Bacchiocchi 1977), by the middle of the second century Sunday has become *the* Christian day for the liturgical assembly. Several New Testament terms and other designations become closely attached to it: the ‘Lord’s Day’; the day of ‘resurrection’; the day of ‘encounter’ with the risen Lord through Word and meal; the ‘day of light’ (as the first day of creation now associated with the ‘light’ of Christ); the ‘eighth day’ (i.e., the day of *new* creation beyond the seven-day cycle); and the day of the ‘epiphany’ or manifestation of the church. As neither the *Christian* Sabbath nor a ‘little Easter’, Sunday becomes not the commemoration of a past event, such as the resurrection, but the icon of ongoing and present ‘communion’ with the risen Lord.

Christians of the first three centuries also knew an annual feast called *Pascha* as the celebration of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Recent scholarship has argued that the most primitive celebration of *Pascha* (possibly reflected already in the New Testament itself) was an all-night vigil held by Christians in Asia Minor on 14 Nisan, the day of Passover in the Jewish calendar and the day of Jesus’ death according to the New Testament (and the equivalent of either 25 March or 6 April, according to some early calendars), which culminated in the celebration of the Eucharist at 3 a.m. (Talley 1986: 1–32). Eschatological in orientation as a vigil awaiting the return of the Lord, the overall emphasis of this ‘Quartodeciman’ (‘fourteen’) *Pascha*, assuming that *Pascha* had been derived from *paschein* (‘to suffer’), was the death of Christ, the true Paschal Lamb, and there is no record of baptisms ever having been part of the celebration. The fourth-century historian Eusebius describes a second-century ‘paschal controversy’ between these ‘Quartodecimans’ and Rome over whether or not the *Pascha* was to be celebrated on a calendrical date or at a Saturday to Sunday vigil *after* the Jewish Passover, a practice presumably followed by churches elsewhere (Egypt and Jerusalem). Although this question was not completely resolved until the Council of Nicaea (325 CE), the Sunday celebration of *Pascha*, preceded by one, two, or even six days of fasting, would become normative practice by the end of the second century. Along with this, a *Sunday* paschal celebration, with its natural associations of Jesus’ resurrection, and Egyptian theology (Clement and Origen), which interpreted *pascha* as ‘passage’, would suggest eventually that the celebration of *Pascha*



Figure 19.5 A fresco of a veiled woman in an act of prayer, from the Catacomb of Saint Callistus, second half of the third century CE. Photo from Wilpert (1903: plate 88).

itself was not only about the ‘passage’ of Christ from death to life but Christian participation in this ‘passage’ through baptism and Eucharist. Hence, in some places (North Africa and Rome), the Paschal Vigil would soon become the prime time for baptism (Bradshaw 1995: 137–47). A nascent ‘paschal triduum’ (primarily fasting

from Friday through the end of the vigil), Holy Week (the association of specific days with events in Jesus' last week), Lenten season (at least at Rome and possibly only three weeks in duration), and a 50-day paschal season called 'Pentecost' (from *Pentecoste* or 'fifty'), in which, like Sundays themselves, both fasting and kneeling were forbidden, are also discernible in this time period, although they are not yet fully liturgicized according to any particular scheme (Talley 1986: 33–7).

Traditional scholarship has assumed that the other annual feasts of Epiphany (6 January) and Christmas (25 December) were fourth-century innovations brought about by Christian adaptation of various pagan solar festivals, with Epiphany developing as the feast of incarnation in the East and Christmas in the West. More recently, Thomas Talley has argued that the origins of both are to be located in this pre-Nicene time period (Talley 1986: 79–134). Their dates, according to Talley, are based on a deliberate calculation which sought to correlate the date of Jesus' death (25 March or 6 April) with his conception leading to a celebration of his 'birth' nine months later on 25 December (possibly celebrated already in third-century North Africa) or 6 January (the date chosen throughout the East). Such calculation, Talley argues, corresponds to an ancient practice which related the death days of illustrious people, including even the patriarchs of the Hebrew Bible, with their birth days since their lives were thought to have had an exact number of years. While it is probably true that the principal focus of such feasts was a unitive celebration of Jesus' 'beginnings', i.e., his birth and/or baptism, it is quite possible that these dates were also selected for the beginning of an annual course of reading of particular Gospels. As such, reading Mark 1 on 6 January in Egypt would naturally bring to expression Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, whereas in Jerusalem, also on 6 January, Matthew 1–2 would suggest a focus on Jesus' nativity and the visit of the Magi.

The final type of feast to be noted in this period is that of the martyrs, celebrated on the anniversary of their deaths, i.e., their *natalē*, or 'heavenly birthday' (Brown 1981). Intensely local in character, these feasts were tied inseparably to a community's possession of a martyr's tomb, remains, or relics around which the community would assemble. Only later, as relics were 'transferred' to other churches, would the martyr cult spread. As those who had given the ultimate 'witness' in the face of persecution the martyrs became concrete signs of Christ's own passion and were regularly believed to have been accorded immediate entrance into heaven. Hence, the veneration of the martyrs as faithful disciples of Christ and prayers asking for their intercession also became characteristic emphases.

WORSHIP, PRACTICE AND BELIEF FROM THE COUNCIL OF NICEA TO THE DEATH OF AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

Initiation

As a result of 'mass conversions' in the wake of Constantine's own conversion, the subsequent legalization and eventual adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman empire, and the Trinitarian and Christological decisions of the first ecumenical councils, several changes in the practice of Christian initiation occur

during the fourth and fifth centuries. Thanks to the extant catechetical homilies of the great ‘mystagogues’ (e.g., Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia for the East, and Ambrose of Milan for the West) the practices of Christian initiation in this period are easily reconstructed (Yarnold 1994). While some local diversity continued to exist, the following came to characterize the overall pattern in the Christian East: (1) the adoption of Paschal Baptism and the now 40-day season of Lent as the time of prebaptismal (daily) catechesis on Scripture, Christian life, and the Creed for the *photizomenoi* (those to be ‘enlightened’); (2) the use of scrutinies (examinations) and daily exorcisms throughout the period of final baptismal preparation; (3) the development of specific rites called *apotaxis* (renunciation) and *syntaxis* (adherence) as demonstrating a ‘change of ownership’ for the candidates; (4) the development of ceremonies like the solemn *traditio* and *redditio symboli* (the presentation and ‘giving back’ of the Nicene Creed); (5) the reinterpretation of the once pneumatic prebaptismal anointing as a rite of exorcism, purification, and/or preparation for combat against Satan; (6) the rediscovery and use of Romans 6 as the dominant paradigm for interpreting the baptismal immersion as entrance into the ‘tomb’ with Christ; (7) the introduction of a postbaptismal anointing associated with the gift and ‘seal’ of the Holy Spirit; and (8) the use of Easter week as time for ‘mystagogical catechesis’ (an explanation of the sacramental ‘mysteries’ the newly initiated had experienced).

Although a similar overall pattern also existed in the West, western sources display some significant differences. Ambrose of Milan, for example, witnesses to a postbaptismal rite of footwashing (*pedilavium*) as an integral component of baptism (Yarnold 1994: 121–3). Some sources from Rome (e.g., the *Letter of John the Deacon to Senarius*; Whitaker 1971: 154–6) and North Africa (Augustine; Whitaker 1970: 103) indicate the presence of three public scrutinies (including even physical examinations) held on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent. And, thanks to an important fifth-century letter from Pope Innocent I to Decentius of Gubbio (Whitaker 1970: 229–30), it is clear that at Rome itself the pattern of episcopal handlaying with prayer and second postbaptismal anointing, noted already in the *Apostolic Tradition*, was understood as an essential aspect and was associated explicitly with the bishop’s prerogative in ‘giving’ the Holy Spirit.

The adoption of several of these ceremonies for the preparation and initiation of candidates was, undoubtedly, the result of the church seeking to ensure that its sacramental life would continue to have some kind of integrity when, in a changed social and cultural context, where Christianity was now favoured by the emperor, authentic conversion and properly motivated desire to enter the Christian community could no longer be assumed. Indeed, as the experience of Augustine himself demonstrates (*Confessions* 1.11), it became common in some places to enrol infants in the catechumenate and then postpone their baptism until much later in life, if ever. Similarly, as the rites themselves take on numerous elements which heightened dramatically the experience of those being initiated, the overall intent was surely to impress upon them the seriousness of the step they were taking (Yarnold 1994: 59–66).

It is not, however, only the baptismal candidates who regularly experienced this process. Egeria, the late fourth-century Spanish pilgrim to Jerusalem, records in her

travel diary that, along with the candidates and their sponsors, members of the faithful also filled the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (see Figure 19.6) for the daily catechetical lectures of the bishop. 'At ordinary services when the bishop sits and preaches,' she writes, 'the faithful utter exclamations, but when they come and hear him explaining the catechesis, their exclamations are louder . . .; and . . . they ask questions on each point'. Further, during the week of mystagogy she notes that the applause of the newly baptized and faithful 'is so loud that it can be heard outside the church'. Because of this, she states that 'all the people in these parts are able to follow the Scriptures when they are read in church' (Wilkinson 1971: 144–6).

Designed for adult converts, the ritual process of Christian initiation in these several sources was to be shortlived, due, in part, to its success in 'converting' the masses. The North African controversy between 'Pelagianism' and Augustine over the long-standing practice of infant initiation, and Augustine's theological rationale for infant initiation based on a theology of 'original sin', however, will lead to the catechumenate's further decline. At the same time, Augustine's lengthy battle with 'Donatism', over the Donatist practice of 'rebaptizing' Catholics and their insistence on the moral character of the baptizer in assuring the valid administration of baptism (see Chapters 37 and 48 of this volume), will lead also to an 'orthodox' sacramental theology based on the use of proper elements and words with Christ himself underscored as the true sacramental minister. If Augustine himself knew an initiation rite similar to those summarized above (Harmless 1995: 79ff.), his own theological emphases, born in the heat of controversy, would set the agenda for a later western-medieval sacramental minimalism focused on 'matter' and 'form', the '*quamprimum*' ('as soon as possible') baptism of infants, and an objective sacramental validity ensured by an '*ex opere operato*' understanding.

Eucharist

'Nowhere did the post-Constantinian transformation of the scale of worship have a greater impact than on the Eucharist' (Baldovin 1991: 168). The shift from domestic to public space, signified by the adaptation of existing, and the imperial funding of, basilicas and shrines (see Figures 19.6 and 19.7), made possible the accommodation of large 'crowds' within Christian liturgical assemblies. So also the rites themselves expanded precisely at those points where greater order in the assembly was needed (i.e., at the entrance of clergy and community, at the presentation or transfer of the Eucharistic gifts to the altar, and at the distribution of communion) with the result that diaconal directions (e.g., 'let us stand', 'let us kneel', etc.), litanies, psalms, chants, and prayers become regular elements. Documents (*Apostolic Constitutions* 8 and Egeria) also show that various categories of non-communing people, for example, catechumens, *photizomenoi*, and penitents preparing for reconciliation, were regularly dismissed from the assembly with rites that included handlaying and prayer before the Eucharist proper began. In one of his homilies John Chrysostom laments not only that the liturgical assemblies are now filled with gossipers, revellers, and pickpockets but that even several of the faithful

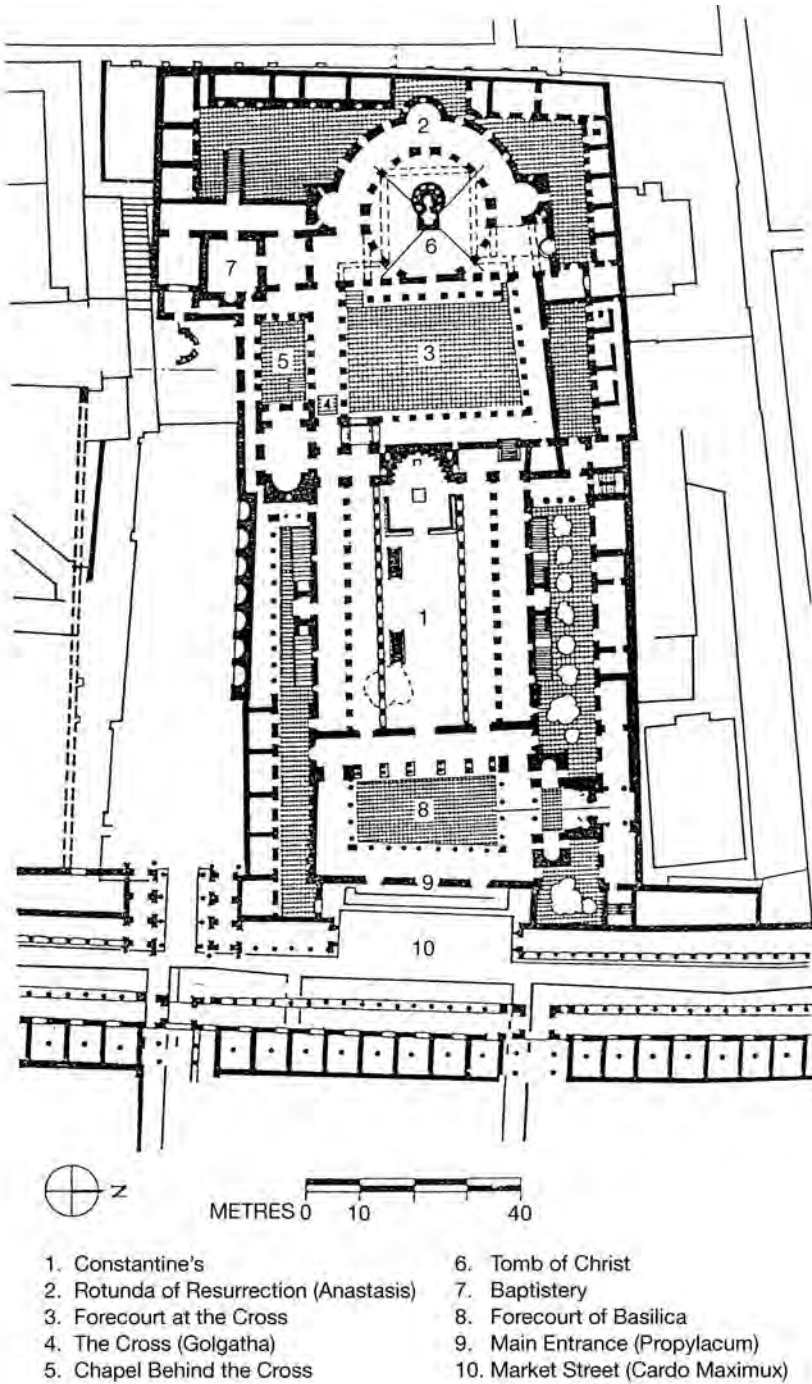


Figure 19.6 The Holy Sepulchre complex, Jerusalem, in the fourth and fifth centuries CE. From Baldovin (1989), reproduced by permission of the author.

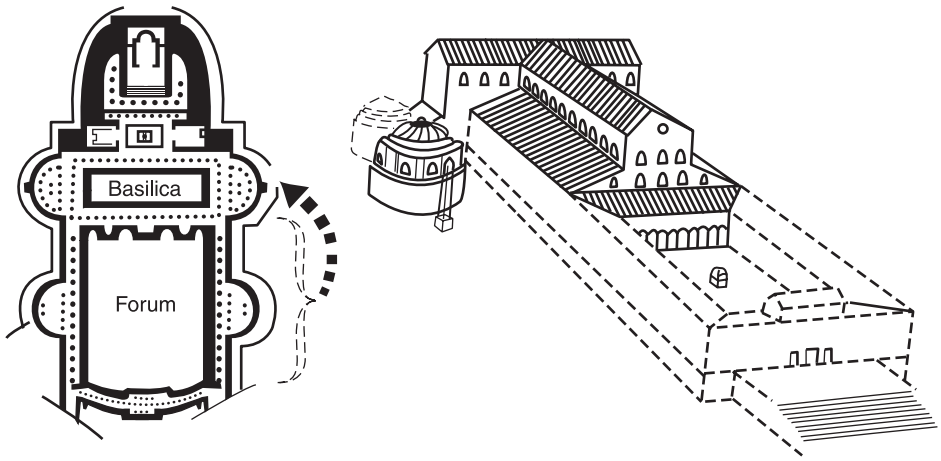


Figure 19.7 Illustration of Trajan's Forum (left) and Old St Peter's, Vatican City (right), by Armando Garzon-Blanco, showing the 'migration' of the forum from a secular Roman basilica to the longitudinal axis of a Christian basilica, thus becoming its courtyard. From Chiat and Mauck (1991: 102), reproduced with the permission of Marchita Mauck and the University of Notre Dame Press.

are leaving before the Eucharist, and, as a result, various dismissal rites for them are also added (Taft 1986b: 29–60; Bradshaw 1996b: 66–7). In the West such *missa* or dismissal rites would eventually suggest the term *missa* or 'mass' for the Eucharist itself.

If Eucharistic liturgies expanded at these points, however, they tended to contract at others. In the liturgy of the Word, for example, the number of biblical readings would gradually be limited to two in most traditions, and, generally, both would be from the New Testament. Nevertheless, preaching itself was anything but neglected. Eastern sources for this period indicate that *several* homilies would regularly be given at the Sunday Eucharist, with any presbyters present preaching first and the bishop last (Bradshaw 1983: 17).

By far one of the most significant developments in this period was the standardization of written texts of the anaphora, a process closely related to the need for liturgical texts to express orthodox teaching against Trinitarian and Christological heresy, and, undoubtedly, to the increasing lack of proficient and prayerful extemporizers (Bouley 1981). Along with this, although the precise origins of their anaphoral use remains debated, the *sanctus* hymn of Isaiah 6 (Spinks 1991; Taft 1991/2; Winkler 1994, 1996), the institution narrative and its accompanying anamnetic offering language (Cutrone 1990: 105–14), even 'consecratory' epicleses of the Holy Spirit, and numerous intercessions now become fixed structural components of these anaphoral prayers resulting from a process of 'cross fertilization', i.e., the borrowing of elements across ecclesial boundaries (Fenwick 1986). The integration of these elements into specific anaphoras results in the classic anaphoral patterns of different traditions called, for example, 'West Syrian',

<i>Antiochene/West Syrian/ Syro-Byzantine</i>	<i>Alexandrian</i>	<i>Roman</i>
(‘St Basil/St John Chrysostom’)	(‘St Mark’)	(‘Roman Canon’)
Dialogue	Dialogue	Dialogue
Preface (invariable)	Preface (invariable)	Preface (variable by feast and/or season)
	Intercessions	
Sanctus/Benedictus	Sanctus	Sanctus/Benedictus
Post-Sanctus		Post-Sanctus (<i>Te igitur, Memento Domine, Communicantes, Hanc Igitur</i>)
	Epiclesis I	<i>Quam oblationem</i>
Institution narrative	Institution narrative	<i>Qui pridie</i> (Institution narrative)
Anamnesis (memorial)	Anamnesis (memorial)	Anamnesis (<i>Unde et memores, Supra quae</i>)
Epiclesis	Epiclesis II	<i>Supplices te</i>
Intercessions		Intercessions (<i>Memento etiam, Nobis quoque, Per quem</i>)
Final doxology	Final doxology	Final doxology

Figure 19.8 Anaphoral structures in Eastern and Western liturgy.³

‘Antiochene’, or ‘Syro-Byzantine’ (e.g., the anaphoras known as ‘St Basil’ and ‘St John Chrysostom’), ‘Alexandrian’ (‘St Mark’), and ‘Roman’ (the ‘Roman Canon’) (see Figure 19.8).

Together with this anaphoral development, a theological concern for ‘consecration’ of the bread and wine into the *‘typos’*, *‘antitypos’*, *‘figura’*, or *‘homoionia’* of the body and blood of Christ develops further as well. Cyril of Jerusalem attributes this to the activity of the Holy Spirit in the epiclesis (Yarnold 1994: 92), and Ambrose of Milan, the first witness to the ‘Roman Canon’, to the recitation of the words of Christ (the institution narrative) by the priest (Yarnold 1994: 132–3). From this point on, East and West will approach the question of Eucharistic ‘consecration’ from these differing points of view.

Mystagogical teaching on the ‘awesome’ and ‘fearful’ nature of Eucharistic par-

ticipation, as well as non-communing attendance on the part of a now largely 'nominal' Christian assembly, will lead to, and be fostered by, allegorical interpretation of the liturgy itself as a kind of dramatic re-enactment of the life of Christ. Here various liturgical elements (e.g., the transfer of the gifts to the altar and the anaphoral epiclesis) become interpreted in relationship to moments in Christ's passion and resurrection (Yarnold 1994: 216). Along with an increased theological emphasis on the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist, a split develops between the liturgy and communion reception to such an extent that the Eucharist becomes almost exclusively a clerical affair and Eucharistic participation becomes focused on individual contemplation of the 'meaning' of the ceremonies and symbols of the rite itself. Aided by the increase of anaphoral intercessions for a variety of different categories of people (living and dead) and other needs, the Eucharist was thus seen increasingly as being 'offered' for those 'needs'. But, to be fair, theology still stressed the 'commemorative' or 'memorial of Christ' aspect of the Eucharistic 'sacrifice' (Bradshaw 1996b: 55–6), and for that matter, in spite of the preponderance of offering language in the 'Roman Canon' the principal understanding even there is that of the Eucharist as the church's great 'sacrifice of *praise*' (Jasper and Cuming 1987: 164).

Daily prayer

During this period the patterns for daily prayer within the first three centuries evolve into different types of daily, public, communal prayer at morning and evening. Thanks to the seminal work of Anton Baumstark (1958), two types stand out with great clarity: *cathedral* and *monastic*. 'Cathedral prayer', so named because of the variety of ministries employed in its performance and on account of its interpretation as the priestly prayer of the whole church in praise and intercession, made use of a number of 'select' elements and 'popular' ceremonies. The core of morning prayer was the daily use of Psalms 148–50 and either Psalm 63 or 51, and evening prayer regularly used the hymn *Phôs Hilaron* to accompany an evening ritual of lamp-lighting (*lucernarium*) – the ultimate origins also of the candle lighting and *Exsultet* of the Easter Vigil liturgy – as well as Ps. 141 (East) and Ps. 105 (West). Various litanies and lengthy prayers of intercession were regular components of both 'offices' and neither the reading of Scripture nor homilies were generally included. By the end of the fifth century, daily offerings of incense also become characteristic (Taft 1986a: 31–56).

The 'monastic' type of daily prayer had its origins among the growing ascetical communities in the deserts of Egypt and Syria. If praise and intercession characterized the cathedral office, the emphasis in the monastic office was on meditation and contemplation geared towards spiritual perfection in the monastic life. Whether prayed alone in cells or in community, the content of the monastic office was the Psalms, recited (or sung by a soloist with some communal response) in their biblical order, alternating with periods of silence, prostrations, and concluding prayers (John Cassian, *Institutes* 2 and 3), and lengthy Scripture readings oriented towards the goal of 'ceaseless' contemplative prayer (Taft 1986a: 57–73).

The influence of monasticism on ecclesial life in general during this period has

profound consequences for the cathedral office. Not only were many of the leading bishops of this period monks themselves, but the development of 'urban' monasteries closely connected with local churches will lead to a 'mixed office' that combined both cathedral and monastic elements as well as the retention of the early pattern of prayer at the third, sixth, and ninth hours and at various intervals during the night (Taft 1986a: 75–140). One of the best examples of this 'mixed office' in the West is the influential *Rule of St Benedict*, where morning prayer (*lauds*) is essentially a 'cathedral office', with the same psalmody assigned to every morning, and evening prayer (*vespers*) a 'monastic office', with Psalms 110–47 constituting a recurring weekly *cursus* recited in order, with four of these psalms assigned to each evening (Fry 1982: 42–6). In addition, while some non-biblical hymns make their appearance in the Eucharistic liturgy during these centuries in the East, the majority of early Christian hymns, including even the *Gloria in Excelsis* (*Apostolic Constitutions* 7), have their origins in this context of daily prayer. When, for example, Augustine describes the corporate singing at Ambrose's cathedral in Milan (*Confessions* 10) it is quite likely that what he refers to is some form of the 'Ambrosian' office hymns.⁴

Liturgical year

If these other rites achieve their 'classic' forms in these centuries, so too does the liturgical year become organized into its traditional fixed pattern. Together with the Nicene decision on the date for *Pascha* (i.e., the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox) and the widespread adoption of Paschal baptism, so a 40-day 'Lent', probably as a synthesis of the Alexandrian post-Epiphany, 40-day period of baptismal preparation and fast with other pre-paschal and/or pre-baptismal preparation periods elsewhere (Johnson 1995b: 118–36; Bradshaw 1995: 137–47), makes its universal appearance as a time for the final preparation of baptismal candidates and penitents, and ascetical preparation for the faithful. Here as well, a fully developed Holy Week and 'Paschal Triduum' is to be noted, with Egeria witnessing to a 'Palm Sunday' procession of palms and a Good Friday rite which included both the reading of John 18–19 and the veneration (kissing) of a relic of the cross, a relic closely guarded by deacons to ensure that none of the 'faithful' would bite off a portion and steal it (Wilkinson 1971: 137–8). Both celebrations would move from Jerusalem to the West, although at Rome 'Palm' Sunday would remain the day for the reading of the Matthean Passion (Matt. 26–7) and only in the Middle Ages would it acquire the palms procession. In none of the early traditions did Holy (Maundy) Thursday evening or Good Friday include a celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy. Rather, the Paschal fast itself began on Thursday evening and the celebration of the Eucharist was seen as incompatible with fasting.

The '50 days' of the Easter celebration also become fully liturgicized during these centuries corresponding to the chronology of Luke-Acts. Although Pentecost Sunday was, originally, a unitive celebration of Jesus' Ascension and the gift of the Holy Spirit, by the beginning of the fifth century the fortieth day of Easter has become the *feast* of the Ascension and Pentecost the *feast* of the Holy Spirit. In spite of an earlier

tradition which forbade fasting and kneeling during the '50 days', some western churches resumed both practices in the time between Ascension and Pentecost (Cabié 1965).

The western celebration of Christmas on 25 December and the eastern celebration of Epiphany on 6 January are adopted universally during these centuries. Whatever the ultimate origin of the dates for these feasts, influenced, undoubtedly, by the continuing popularity of the pagan solar cults and a concern for Christological orthodoxy, Christmas becomes the universal feast of the incarnation *par excellence* and, at least in the East, Epiphany becomes limited to the celebration of Jesus' baptism. Although Jesus' baptism forms the content of Epiphany in some western traditions as well, at Rome Epiphany focused on the visit of the Magi as the manifestation of salvation to the gentiles. A season of preparation for these feasts also begins to make its appearance in some sources, but the full development of 'Advent' itself is a later phenomenon (Talley 1986: 135–55).

The filling out and universalizing of the 'sanctoral' cycle is also a characteristic of this period as relics of the martyrs and their cult now become increasingly 'transferred' to other churches. Together with martyr feasts, this period also witnesses to the inclusion on local liturgical calendars of influential bishops and ascetics as exemplary models of faith. Biblical saints, especially the Virgin Mary, after the proclamation of the *Theotokos* doctrine at the Council of Ephesus (431 CE), make their appearance as well. Often connected to the building and dedication of churches in her honour, the feasts of 'Mary Theotokos', later her 'Dormition' (15 August), her 'Nativity' (8 September), the 'Annunciation' (25 March), and the 'Presentation' of Christ to Simeon and Anna (2 February) are well in place by the fifth century in the East. All four would be adopted subsequently by Rome, and, with the addition of a Roman feast on 1 January, commemorating the *Theotokos* decree of Ephesus, would remain the only Roman 'Marian' feasts until the fourteenth century (Cabié 1986: 130–8).

Traditional scholarship has argued that the concern for dates, the multiplication of feasts, and the development of Holy Week in this period is the result of a new 'historicizing' mentality which replaced an earlier eschatological orientation (Dix 1945: 303–96). But, in underscoring the concern for dates even in the pre-Nicene period (e.g., the 'Quartodeciman' *Pascha* and the dates of 25 March and 6 April), recent research has suggested that there is no necessary contradiction between 'history' and 'eschatology' and, thus, there is no reason to posit a new mentality to account for these developments (Talley 1986: 1–32; Baldovin 1987: 102–4; Taft 1984: 15–30). Rather, in places like Jerusalem it would be natural to expect that Christians would want to visit the holy places and to celebrate there the events associated in Scripture with Christ's life. Such development was inevitable, especially with the imperial funding and building of basilicas at those places.

CONCLUSION

The story of Christian worship, practice and belief in the first five centuries of the common era is one of development, change, accommodation, and adaptation. From diverse and multiple origins and theologies, the church emerges at the end of this period with a rather homogeneous liturgical structure, style, and theological interpretation. If some important and distinctive elements still remain within the various traditions, the challenges of doctrinal heresy and the changed socio-political climate of the immediate post-Constantian era result, nevertheless, in relatively similar rites for initiation, Eucharist, daily prayer, and the liturgical year, as well as common perceptions about the meaning of those rites.

At the same time it should be noted, especially with regard to the challenges of doctrinal heresy, that worship was not only formed by, but also helped in forming, orthodox Christian teaching. Orthodox Trinitarian and Christological doctrine developed, in part at least, from the church at prayer, as the baptismal-credal profession of faith gave rise to the 'official' creeds themselves, as prayer *to* Christ contributed to understanding his being 'homouousios' with the Father, as the Holy Spirit's 'divine' role in baptism shaped the theology of the Spirit's divinity, and as early devotion to Mary as *Theotokos* gave rise to the decree of Ephesus. While 'orthodoxy' means 'right thinking', such 'right thinking' often developed from the doxology of the church, where several of these doctrines were prayed liturgically long before they were formalized dogmatically.

So it has been ever since. The practice of Christian worship forms the belief of the church (*'ut legem credendi statuat lex supplicandi'*). In turn, worship itself is formed further by that belief, and, further still, continues to form people into believers and disciples of the crucified and risen Lord.

NOTES

- 1 These images and metaphors include forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38); new birth through water and the Holy Spirit (John 3:5; Titus 3:5–7); putting off the 'old nature' and 'putting on the new' (that is, 'being clothed in the righteousness of Christ') (Gal. 3:27; Col. 3:9–10); initiation into the 'one body' of the Christian community (1 Cor. 12:13; see also Acts 2:42); washing, sanctification, and justification in Christ and the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:11); enlightenment (Heb. 6:4; 10:32; 1 Pet. 2:9); being 'anointed' and/or 'sealed' by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:21–2; 1 John 2:20, 27); being 'sealed' or 'marked' as belonging to God and God's people (2 Cor. 1:21–2; Eph. 1:13–14; 4:30; Rev. 7:3); and, of course, being joined to Christ through participation in His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:3–11; Col. 2:12–15).
- 2 Plate 41.3 in Wilpert (1903), reproduced in Chapter 9 of this volume, is a very similar scene, dated by Wilpert a little earlier in the second century CE.
- 3 For texts, see Jasper and Cuming (1987: 114–23: 'St Basil'; 129–34: 'St John Chrysostom'; 57–66: 'St Mark'; 159–67: 'Roman Canon').
- 4 On music, see Chapter 29 of this volume and Quasten (1983). For the important contribution which Ambrose made to Christian hymnody, see Chapter 47 of this volume.

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PART V

THE INTELLECTUAL HERITAGE



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THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS



Carolyn Osiek

INTRODUCTION

The literary vitality exhibited in the writing of the New Testament in the second half of the first Christian century did not cease once that collection was completed. With no evident break, the flow of early Christian writing continued, including many of the works that would later be labelled ‘apocryphal’ and even ‘heretical’.¹ Part of that stream of literary output constituted what in the mid-seventeenth century came to be known as the ‘Apostolic Fathers’,² a collection of writings that was believed to have come not from the apostolic generation, but from those immediately trained by the apostles, and thus to be reflective of their faith. Several European scholars at that time took new interest in early Christian writings and seem to have seized on this idea in the same years with newly printed editions of most of these works, those of Barnabas, Clement, Hermas, Ignatius, and Polycarp. The letter of Diognetus, the fragments of Papias, and the *Apology* of Quadratus were added by A. Gallandi in 1765, and the *Didache* or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, now part of the collection, was not discovered until 1873 and published in 1883.

The core of the collection has always been the first five authors, Barnabas, Clement, Hermas, Ignatius and Polycarp, along with, once it was added, the *Didache*. Diognetus, Papias, and the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* have drifted in and out, depending on the degree to which each editor wishes to be inclusive. Quadratus has more frequently been grouped with his own classification of second-century apologists, where Diognetus also belongs by genre. The early second-century writer Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, is said to have written five books of traditional and historical recollections that, unfortunately, survive only in quotations from later church writers. Thus there is no literary coherence to his surviving work. Here we will consider the two *Letters of Clement*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Letter of Barnabas*, the *Didache*, the *Letters of Ignatius and Polycarp*, and the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*. All texts are readily accessible to English readers.³

Even within this more limited list, the diversity of literary genre is impressive: letters, treatises, apocalypse, church order, and martyrdom account. As with the books of the New Testament, each arises from a specific context in the continuous

life of Christians, which was of course lived within their own Graeco-Roman and Jewish culture. Also, as with the New Testament, any attempt to synthesize or harmonize would be futile. Unlike the New Testament, there is not even full agreement on the number of writings in the collection, as seen in the previous paragraph. Some of these writings have left us considerable evidence of their context, and some precious little. Most of these works have always been known to scholars, though many of them suffered neglect over the centuries. They have been thought to represent the church immediately after the time of the writing of the New Testament, yet some of the earlier writings of the Apostolic Fathers (1 *Clement*, the *Didache*) may predate the last of the New Testament books. Their total time span is probably from the end of the first to somewhere in the middle of the second century. Thus rather than being the next step in Christian literature, they are really the overlapping and continuing thread that carries Christian tradition into the second century, 'a messy, confrontational century' (Wagner 1994: 223) that would end with an older, wiser, but more diverse Christianity than it began.

All of these writings might be said to contain, in some way and in varying extent, two characteristics: paraenesis or general moral teaching, and some kind of relationship to Israel. These facts give us a glimpse of some of the problems and challenges that beset these churches: how to maintain fervour and seriousness in a growing movement and how to sort out its increasingly complex and hostile situation vis-à-vis Judaism. Beyond that and their chronological affinity, there is not much that links them all.

Though the strategy of 1 *Clement* is specific, it contains elements of general paraenesis. The same could be said for the *Letter of Barnabas*. While the *Shepherd of Hermas* is an apocalypse in structure, it contains long passages of moral instruction. The *Didache* is predominantly paraenetic. The *Letters of Ignatius and Polycarp*, letters of friendship, thanks, and persuasion, often include paraenetic sections. Even the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, a theologized account of the protagonist's execution, offers him and others as examples of what to do and what not to do (2.1; 4.1).

The best way to describe the relationship to Israel of the earliest Christians is to say that they were part of it. The majority of the first generation were certainly Jews, and the Scriptures were an integral part of their teaching and worship. It is not clear at what point a majority gentile Christianity completed its separation from its parent faith, but this process was probably complete by the middle of the second century. The Apostolic Fathers reflect a variety of steps along the way. 1 and 2 *Clement* draw widely on the Hebrew Scriptures and presume their validity for interpretation of the present Christian situation. The *Shepherd of Hermas* does the same for Hellenistic Jewish paraenetic traditions and seems to contain echoes of some major Jewish intertestamental writings, especially 4 *Ezra*. The *Didache* uses both. Ignatius has emerged from identification with Judaism (*Ioudaismos*) and asserts its inferiority to *Christianismos* (*Epistle to the Philadelphians* 6.1), while the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* acts out the new antagonistic relationship that will henceforth characterize the interaction between the two groups by implying that Jews participated in the persecution of the bishop-martyr and prevented his followers from getting his body after his death (12.1; 13.1; 17.2; 18.1). At the far extreme, Barnabas' entire message is that where Jews misunderstood the covenant and the law, Christians get them

right. Thus within the collection of the Apostolic Fathers the full range of ambiguous attitudes towards Judaism can be seen.

THE WRITINGS

1 Clement

1 *Clement* may be the best known of the Apostolic Fathers today. It was included with the New Testament in the fourth-century Codex Alexandrinus. The text has therefore always been known and revered. By internal evidence, it is a letter from the church of Rome to the church of Corinth on the occasion of some kind of upheaval of leadership in the Corinthian church, in which the author seeks to persuade the Corinthians to return to the previous arrangement. Early tradition attaches to the letter the name of Clement, around whom there is more legend than historical information. An enormous amount of apocryphal literature was attached to his figure (Lightfoot [1889–90] 1981: I, 14–103), ranging from his association with Peter in Rome to his exile by Trajan in the Crimea and the miraculous discovery there of his underwater tomb!

What can probably be safely affirmed is that Clement was a prominent leader in the Roman church towards the end of the first century and that there may be a connection between the Christian writer Clement and the family of Titus Flavius Clemens, who was executed and his wife Flavia Domitilla exiled by Domitian (81–96 CE; see Figure 20.1) on a charge of atheism (that is, neglect of civil religion) and Judaizing (Dio Cassius, *Epitome* 67.14).

Church historians from Eusebius on have interpreted this charge of acquiring Jewish customs as a misinterpretation of the embracing of Christianity. Not that this Flavius Clemens would be the author of the letter, but it was the common custom of freedmen to adopt the personal name of their patron,⁴ and it could be that large numbers of his household were Christian. Later church tradition names Clement as second or third successor of Peter as bishop of Rome. Since the leadership structure of a single bishop probably did not come to Rome for another century, this is obviously later harmonization, which does not preclude the possibility that Clement was indeed a strong leader in the Roman church of his time.

There is also a location in Rome with a very old tradition connecting it to the name of Clement. The *titulus Clementis* (Figure 20.2), one of the designated oldest churches in Rome, is located to the south-east of the Flavian amphitheatre or Colosseum and the Ludus Magnus, the major gladiatorial training school. Both complexes were completed during the reign of Domitian. The fourth-century basilica of St Clement was erected over parts of two earlier but post-Neronian buildings, one a brick structure, perhaps an apartment house, that also contained a sanctuary of the god Mithras; the other a large building whose walls are of impressive hewn tufa blocks. This building, only partially excavated, seems to have consisted of small rooms around a large central courtyard, and was probably a warehouse. The altar of the fourth-century church lies directly over one of the rooms in the north wall of the warehouse building. There is no evidence of a luxurious private residence in the



Figure 20.1 The emperor Domitian: Rome, Vatican Museum. Photo C. Osiek.

immediate vicinity. It is therefore quite possible that the location of the fourth-century church preserves a memory from a century earlier of a simple warehouse room in which Christians met for worship into the third century. Again, there is only circumstantial, but pre-Constantinian, evidence to connect the place with the name of Clement.

The dating of *1 Clement* is based on the assumption of Christianity on the part of Titus Flavius Clemens, along with an oblique reference at the opening of the letter to ‘sudden and repeated misfortunes and reverses’ in Rome. This reference is often thought to refer to a persecution under Nero (54–68), but this is too far in the past, or under Domitian, enhanced by references in Rev. 1:9; 2:10, 13 and a traditional

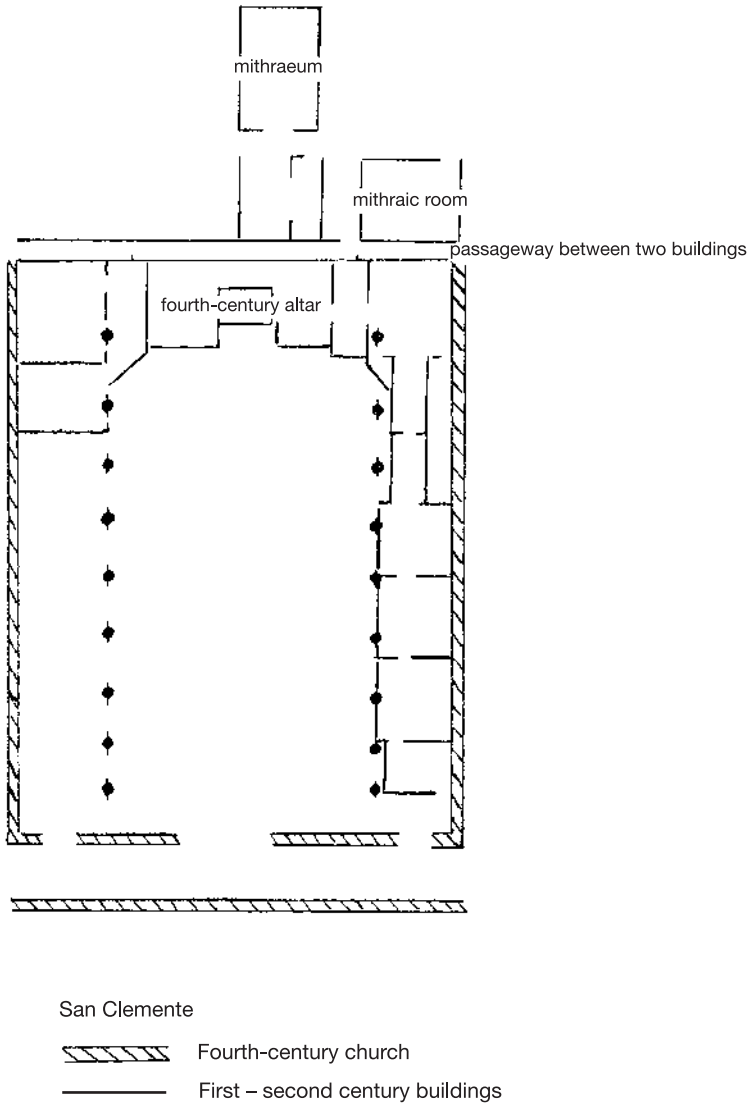


Figure 20.2 Plan of the fourth-century church *Titulus Clementis*, over first-second century buildings. Copyright C. Osiek.

dating of Revelation during the reign of Domitian. The traditional dating of *1 Clement* is therefore about 96. But recent scholarship has placed in serious doubt any kind of persistent persecution of the church by Domitian, and it has been shown that a reference to recent setbacks as an excuse for not having written sooner is a literary convention. Thus all attempts to date the letter precisely rest on circular and circumstantial evidence (Welborn 1984).

The letter is a carefully constructed argument intended to persuade the

Corinthian church that unity is essential to their Christian identity, and that they have placed that unity in jeopardy by ousting the presbyters who had been governing the church and replacing them with another group of leaders.⁵ The author first presents examples of how envy and strife placed obstacles in the path of various biblical characters and martyrs, including Peter and Paul (the earliest reference to their martyrdom, Clement's *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 5.4–5). Next he proposes a long string of biblical examples of obedience and humility, including that of Jesus. Arguments with regard to the resurrection and rewards promised to the faithful and from the need for authority and apostolic tradition lead to the climax of the rhetorical strategy: it is therefore not right to remove from their position of moral and liturgical leadership the persons appointed by those who followed in the steps of the apostles (44.3). The leaders of the 'revolt' are therefore urged to submit to the authority of the presbyters (57.1) and all to come to appropriate repentance.

1 Clement was enormously influential in successive centuries with church authorities who sought to consolidate centralized authority. Attention has been focused on chapter 42, in which the author expresses the beginning of a notion of apostolic succession: God sent Jesus, who gave the Gospel to the apostles, who passed it on to their disciples, appointed by them to be *episkopoi* (overseers or bishops) and *diakonoi* (ministers or deacons; see Phil. 1:1). With creative exegesis of Isa. 60:17 LXX, he argues that these offices were even foreseen by the prophet. Since in 57.1 the principal leaders of the community are *presbyteroi* (presbyters or elders), this title and that of *episkopoi* seem still to have been interchangeable in the churches of the time.

It has been suggested that Clement's rather hierarchical and even military notions (see chapter 37) of the exercise of authority indicate his identification with the ruling class through participation as agent, as a powerful freedman would (Jeffers 1991). His purpose is not to develop a notion of apostolic succession or church authority, but to proclaim and urge the restoration of unity which he sees as absolutely essential to Christian living (Bowe 1988).

The Shepherd of Hermas

The *Shepherd of Hermas*, a book of revelations granted to Hermas in Rome by the agency of two heavenly figures (the first an old woman and the second an angel in the form of an shepherd), was well known and highly valued in the patristic church. Irenaeus, Clement, and Origen speak of it in terms that suggest they considered it scripture. Tertullian appreciated it greatly until his Montanist conversion, after which he could no longer tolerate its offer of a second chance to the repentant. Along with *Barnabas*, it was included towards the end of the Codex Sinaiticus of the New Testament in the fourth century. By the time of Eusebius and Athanasius, it was understood to be not part of the canon and therefore not to be read publicly, but nevertheless to be beneficial for private reading. The *Shepherd* was the most widely read Christian book outside our present biblical canon in the first five centuries of the church. If today 1 Clement may be the best known of the Apostolic Fathers, *Hermas* was then.

The whole text is divided into *Visions*, *Mandates*, and *Similitudes*. These sectional divisions do not indicate shifts of genre, however, for there are visions and revela-

tions, commandments and symbolic narratives throughout. In general appearance the book is an apocalypse, for it gives accounts of revelatory communications that have to do with human destiny in this world and beyond. The genre of apocalypse has long been disputed for the *Shepherd*, however, since the bulk of the content is allegorical paraenesis. In overall form its classification as apocalypse should be maintained, even if it stretches the limits of that genre to the utmost.⁶

The date of writing is uncertain, though the full text was probably written over a long period of time in which it was first proclaimed orally and only then in segments committed to writing. The earliest reference is to Clement who is to copy the message and send it to other churches, because “that is what he is supposed to do” (*Vis.* 2.4.3). Undoubtedly Clement the Roman church leader is intended. His role as church secretary fits perfectly with the letter attributed to him. Whether this is an actual contemporary reference to the historical Clement or a literary device to connect Hermas’ revelation with a revered but past name is difficult to say. If it is genuine, and *if* the first letter of Clement is to be dated to the end of the first century (which as we have seen is not an airtight argument), then we have here the placement of the first and oldest part of the *Shepherd* around the same time. An outside reference, the Muratorian Canon, seeks to identify Hermas the author with a mid-second-century Roman church leader named Pius. The reliability of this reference has also been much debated. If the sections of the book were composed gradually over time as the themes and images were developed and expanded in response to audience participation, it is not impossible that the composition may have spanned as long as thirty or forty years in the first half of the second century.

Provided that the clues to social setting are basically reliable,⁷ we know more about the author of the *Shepherd* than about any other author in the Apostolic Fathers collection. Hermas was a foundling at Rome, one of the abandoned infants frequently taken in by another family and raised as a slave. He was brought up in a Greek-speaking household, which would have been the case with the majority of lower class families in the capital, and later sold at least once, to a woman named Rhoda (a Greek name that possibly indicates her own servile or at least non-Roman origins). Sometime later he was manumitted, either by her or more likely by a later owner, and, as a Roman freedman, he was at the time of writing a married householder with grown children, heavily invested in commerce of some kind.⁸

At some point in the course of his adult life, Hermas believed that he had received a vision of great import and the responsibility to communicate it to the whole church of which he was a member, though not an official leader. The original core of that message is probably contained in *Vis.* 1.3. It is a call to change priorities and lifestyles based on the goodness of God the creator and on what God expects. The revelatory agent of the first part, the *Visions*, is an elderly woman who, besides giving oral revelation, shows him the vision of a tower that is being built on water. At the conclusion of the *Visions*, the woman disappears and an angel companion in the form of a shepherd comes to be with him and show him what more he must learn (see Figure 20.3).

The *Mandates* are a body of moral teaching constructed for the most part along the lines of the ‘Two Ways’ tradition of instruction.⁹ They contain the earliest Christian teaching on the discernment of spirits, a discussion of the criteria for true and false



Figure 20.3 Side panel of fourth-century sarcophagus, in the Vatican Museum, Rome, depicting a female wisdom figure with scroll flanked by two male disciples, possibly Peter and Paul, with shepherds (typical pastoral figures) on either side. Photo C. Osiek.

prophets, and developed discussions of the effects of doublemindedness. The third and longest section, the *Similitudes* (longer than both of the other sections combined), contains several distinctive images but is dominated by two: the cosmic willow tree and a recap of the tower. Both are used to illustrate the variety of ways in which believers respond to the call of faith.

Much of the teaching is done through allegory, using detailed examples from the visions. For example, in the first construction of the tower, square white stones that fit perfectly are church leaders alive or dead who ministered well and lived in harmony with one another, while the stones that are broken and thrown away are those who knew the truth but did not remain in it. Those with cracks are they who harbour malice against others, and the stones that are too short believe but have not completely got rid of their evil ways (*Vis.* 3.5.1; 3.6.1–3).

The text teaches through images and parables, like that of the building of the tower (*Vis.* 3; *Sim.* 9.2–9); living in a strange country as an image of earthly existence (*Sim.* 1); the symbiotic agricultural relationship of elm and vine as illustration of how rich and poor relate in the church (*Sim.* 2); or the great cosmic willow tree, from which branches are taken and cultivated as illustrations of different ways of receiving and living the word of God (*Sim.* 8). Most of the images seem to come from a Graeco-Roman common ground: the female personification of the church as initial revelatory agent, a shepherd as second revelatory agent and companion, the cosmic tree, the elm and vine, the tower, the mountains of Arcadia.

Yet the *Shepherd* also contains long sections of direct paraenesis, moral instruction in virtuous living, mostly in the central section, the *Mandates*, but scattered throughout the full text as well. They rely rather on Hellenistic Jewish moral traditions, often on the ‘Two Ways’ tradition of illustrating both a negative way (‘dark’ or ‘of death’) and a contrasting positive way (‘light’ or ‘of life’).

The text shows hardly any interest in Christology. The name of Jesus does not appear and the name Christ crops up only once in a doubtful variant reading at *Vis.* 3.6.6. The Son of God is brought in a few times, in puzzling ways in which he is first

easily confused with the Holy Spirit (*Sim.* 5.5), then with the Great Angel who sends the angel-shepherd to be Hermas' guide (*Sim.* 9.12). At one point, the church, the Holy Spirit, and the Son of God seem to be one (*Sim.* 9.1.1). The resolution of these confusions is to take each portion of the text on its own merits, and not to try to work out a cohesive system in a text that was not written cohesively.

If Christology remains puzzling, ecclesiology in the *Shepherd* is highly developed. The idea of the church as both transcendent symbol and real life collective group with its strengths and weaknesses is very clear. The older woman who first appears to Hermas early identifies herself as the church, yet she interprets for him a vision of the tower being built—which is also the church. The church has both strong and weak members, and is in process of construction. When the tower is completed, the end will come. Yet in the course of the long narrative, the tower is never completed. The woman becomes progressively younger in Hermas' visions and she explains that the reason for this phenomenon is the conversion of church members to more fervent faith life.

The author's chief concern is the call to change of heart on behalf of his community. Their attitude that most troubles him is 'doublemindedness' (see *Jas.* 4:8; 2 *Clement* 19.2) which makes people hesitate, doubt, and be divided in their loyalties rather than go forward energetically with firm faith. There are many obstacles that lie in the way of such faith. One of the principal ones is too much attention paid to daily and business affairs, and the concern for what others (non-believers) will think to see them associating with lower status persons (e.g., *Vis.* 3.6.2, 5; *Man.* 10.1.4; *Sim.* 8.8.1; 9.20.1). Both of these concerns fit very well what we know of the freedman class in the first centuries of the empire: many were economically very successful and, at the same time, in a highly status-conscious society they were some of the most sensitive to their exclusion from high-status civic positions and to their own striving for status within their own limitations (Osiek 1983).

Quite in contrast to 1 *Clement*, the literary level of the *Shepherd* is not very high, and the text defeats all efforts to discover its complete structure. It is a long, sprawling document that shows signs of many levels of expansion in the form of additions and further thoughts on initial themes. The core of the text was probably formed from pieces of oral narrative, revised and added to many times, and finally put together into a whole text that therefore, understandably, cannot be read for internal cohesion (Osiek 1998). Nevertheless, it was highly appreciated in the early church both because of its imaginative and prophetic symbolism and its solid moral teaching.

The Second Letter of Clement to the Corinthians

The *Second Letter of Clement* has nothing in common with 1 *Clement*, but thematically comes closer to some parts of the *Shepherd of Hermas*. Yet by the fifth century in parts of the Greek and Syriac traditions 2 *Clement* was attached to 1 *Clement* in manuscripts and may even have been considered Scripture in the Syriac church. It is not at all a letter, but a homily or sermon, perhaps the oldest extant Christian sermon, with the possible exception of the canonical so-called Letter to the Hebrews, a treatise or sermon with a letter-ending artificially added (Heb. 13:22–5). Nearly every section

of 2 *Clement* begins with a hortatory subjunctive “let us”, as the author urges on his hearers to further excitement and commitment in the Christian life. The text seems intended to be proclaimed to a live congregation by a presbyter after the reading of some Scripture passage by a lector (17.3; 19.1). It is possible that the passage just read was Isa. 54:1, which receives lengthy comment in chapter 2. In the same chapter, a saying of Jesus that occurs in all three Synoptic Gospels, ‘I came not to call righteous, but sinners’ (Matt. 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32) is quoted as *graphe*, the usual term for Scripture or authoritative text. That the cited source is not a saying of the Lord but rather *graphe* distinguishes the time of the author from the first generations (contrast for example 1 Cor. 7:10; 9:14).

Time and place of origin are unknown, and 2 *Clement* has received little attention from scholars. Four theories of origin have been proposed. Hilgenfeld, Harnack, and Goodspeed suggested that it was the letter of Bishop Soter of Rome (c. 166–74) to Corinth reported by Eusebius (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.23.11), then kept together with 1 *Clement* in the archives where it eventually took on the same name (Lake 1912; Donfried 1973). Many have objected to this theory that in genre the text is really not a letter at all. Lightfoot noticed the references to athletic contests in 7.1–5 and suggested that the sermon was preached in Corinth at the time of the Isthmian games nearby sometime between 120 and 140, eventually winding up, as in the previous thesis, in the archives closely connected with 1 *Clement* (Lightfoot [1889–90] 1981: II, 194–208). It is to be noted that the most prominent use of athletics in the genuine letters of Paul is also addressed to Corinth (1 Cor. 9:24–7). C. Richardson, stressing the anti-gnostic elements in the letter and its quotation from an apocryphal gospel known to have been circulating in Alexandria in the second century,¹⁰ placed its origins in that time and place (Lightfoot and Harmer [1891] 1989: 66). Yet a fourth theory of origin is that it is a sermon preached by the reinstated presbyters at Corinth after the argument of 1 *Clement* was successfully acted upon there; thus it is to be dated earlier than is usually presumed, 98–100 (Donfried 1973, 1974). While all of the above theories have points to commend them, none has won the support of a majority of scholars. The origins of 2 *Clement* remain a mystery.

The text may be divided form-critically into four sections: theological (1–2), ethical (3–14), eschatological (15–8), and conclusion (19–20) (Donfried 1973). The theology and ecclesiology are incarnational, perhaps even anti-gnostic (Donfried 1973, 1974). Here the text draws close to some of the concerns of the *Shepherd of Hermas*. While the church is the assembly of believers, it is also a transcendent feminine reality created before anything else (2 *Clem.* 14.1–2; *Herm. Vis.* 2.4.1). In both texts, the distinction between this pre-existent church and Jesus (2 *Clement*) or the Son of God (*Hermas*) is not totally clear. In an explicit exegesis of Gen. 1:27, with Eph. 5:23–32 lurking in the background, 2 *Clement* departs from *Hermas* by going on to identify male with Christ and female with church, the spiritual church then being revealed in the flesh of Christ. The consequence of this identification is that the flesh must be safeguarded and honoured (here similarity with *Herm. Sim.* 5.6.5–7.4 returns), so that the one who abuses the flesh abuses the church and will not receive the Spirit, who is Christ (14.2–5). Also different from the *Shepherd* is the explicit connection in 2 *Clement* of this necessary reverence for the flesh with bodily resurrection (9.1–5).

The *Didache*

The *Didache* or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* is extant in only one manuscript dated to 1056, discovered in the library of the patriarch of Jerusalem in Constantinople in 1873, and published in 1883. It is the earliest known document of the genre of church order; that is, a compilation of instructions and procedures about community life. The genre was later to grow into the major church order documents of the third and fourth centuries, the *Didascalia* and *Apostolic Constitutions*, for which the *Didache* serves as a literary basis. It is a much earlier document, usually dated to the turn of the first to second century (J. Betz in Draper 1996: 244–5) and located somewhere in the East, perhaps Syria. It is really a composite of three different genres, each section probably having been written separately and later combined with the others by an editor. Chapters 1–6 are a moral instruction in the form of the Two Ways. Chapters 7–15 are a true church order that gives procedures first for liturgy and discipline (7–10), then for reception of itinerant apostles and prophets, and finally for *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* (overseers and ministers; cf. Phil. 1:1) (11–15). Finally, chapter 16 is very different in genre, a mini-apocalypse that stirs to eschatological warning and expectation, with the ultimate enemies, false prophets, to arise from within the community itself. Concern about false teachers and an eschatological perspective, however, are not entirely absent from the concerns expressed in the earlier parts of the text (6.1; 11.1) (Draper in Jefford 1995: 285).

The text is full of allusions similar to the canonical Gospels, most heavily to Matthew, including a version of the Lord's Prayer quite similar to Matthew's, to be prayed three times daily (ch. 8). Knowledge of that Gospel is generally presumed. The Two Ways teaching of chapters 1–6 contains several parallels to *Barnabas* 18–21, probably drawn from a common Jewish ethical teaching source that contains close ties as well to the later *Doctrina Apostolorum* and the earlier *Community Rule* (1 QS) 3:13–4:26 from Qumran.¹¹ The teaching, prayers, and attitude of the document are fundamentally Jewish, in spite of the warning not to fast on Mondays and Thursdays with 'the hypocrites' or pray as they do (8.1–2; cf. Matt. 6:5, 16; 23:13, 15 *passim*). As recent scholarship has recognized in the case of Matthew, this is likely intra-Jewish polemic between a Messianic group and their critics rather than Jew vs. gentile. The *Didache* can be seen as entirely the product of 'Christian' Jews.

The liturgical section (7–10) contains instructions for celebration of baptism and Eucharist (using those terms) and for fasting. Three different baptismal formulae are given: 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (7.1), 'in name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit' (without articles, 7.3), and the probably earliest 'in name of (the) Lord' (9.5; cf. Acts 2:38; 8:16; *passim*) (W. Rordorf in Draper 1996:217). Baptism is ideally to be in cold running water, preceded by a fast of one or two days (7).

The formulaic prayer for Eucharist has given rise to many speculations about the original form of the dominical Eucharistic sayings since it has no 'words of institution' like the Synoptic and Pauline narratives of the Last Supper. The prayers over cup and bread (in that order)¹² are Jewish blessing prayers, the latter concluding with the eschatological wish that the church might be gathered together in the kingdom (9). The ritual as given here may reflect a very early version of Eucharist, or

it may be a combination of *agape* meal and Eucharist as sacred ritual, or a deliberate transformation from Eucharist to *agape* (argued by J. Betz in Draper 1996: 244–75). Whichever it is, the text witnesses to a wider variety of ways of celebrating Eucharist in the early church than would be known only from canonical sources.

The structure of leadership in the community is puzzling. There are apostles, prophets, and teachers—the three roles named by Paul in 1 Cor. 12:28 – but they may not all be distinct, being, rather, interchangeable titles for the same people, based on the memory of earlier times when these were the most honoured titles of leadership. They seem to be itinerant preachers who visit communities to share teaching. While all grammatical references to these people are masculine, there is no reason to exclude that some could be women, since we know of female apostles, prophets, and teachers in the Pauline churches and later (Rom. 16:7; 1 Cor. 11:5; Acts 18:26; 21:9).

There are established behavioural criteria for discerning the false prophet: ordering a meal ‘in the spirit’ and eating of it; asking for money and keeping it rather than giving to the needy; not practising what he/she preaches; staying more than three days without working (11.7–13; 12.2). The final chapter of the section on leadership (15) urges that *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* be honoured with respect equal to that of the prophets and teachers. Most commentators assume the itinerant apostle/prophets to be the earlier and recognized leaders, while this community is at the turning point of beginning to establish local, permanent leadership, perhaps exercised by the community patrons, under the titles of *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* (already in place much earlier in Philippi, for example: Phil. 1:1). It has been suggested that the reverse is true, that an established government by *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* is being put into question by the arrival of itinerant prophets (Draper in Jefford 1995: 291–4). However, the passage takes the apologetic offensive to make the point that *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* must be proved to be truthful, not ‘lovers of money’ because they also do the same ministry as the prophets and teachers. They are therefore not to be disregarded but to be held in equal honour (15.1–2). Clearly the “overseers and ministers” are the newcomers who must be accepted.

The *Didache* fills in a gap in our knowledge of early church life that we might not even know existed without this text. Without it we would have very little knowledge of how sacramental practice was developing at that early stage, nor would we know the extent of apostolic itinerant forms of leadership beyond the Pauline era or the degree of genuinely Jewish spirituality that remained in early Christianity for a remarkably long time.

The Epistle of Barnabas

If the *Didache* is the work of the Apostolic Fathers that fits most easily within the matrix of Judaism, the *Letter* or *Epistle of Barnabas* is the one most directly engaged with Judaism and most directly and thoroughly in opposition to it. While it is hardly likely that Barnabas the companion of Paul is the author, from earliest traditions (a third-century Latin translation) the text has been ascribed to that name. Nearly all commentators take seriously the reference to the destroyed Temple and a rebuilding in the present by those who destroyed it (16.3–4), and most would

therefore assign the text to the last years of Hadrian's reign (117–38), when there was apparently some consideration of allowing the Jerusalem Temple to be rebuilt, though Hadrian in the end built a temple to Jupiter on the site in his new city of Aelia Capitolina. Evidence of the episode is elusive, and the reference in *Barnabas* can hardly be to the temple of Jupiter itself. A quotation from Dan. 7:24 in *Barn.* 4.4 about ten kings followed by a little king who will subdue three of them seems to be taken by the author as prophecy fulfilled in his own day. No matter how commentators try to count emperors, all attempts to make the count come out to Hadrian are unconvincing.

The Greek text was included in the major fourth-century New Testament Codex Sinaiticus just before the *Shepherd of Hermas*, and with it was therefore probably considered Scripture by those who produced the codex. *Barnabas* is not really a letter at all, but a written treatise (17.2) that combines a theological argument (1–17) with a paraenetic instruction according to the Two Ways (18–21), although the literary motif of two ways extends throughout the work (Hvalvik 1996).

In the more traditional explicit Two Ways teaching of chapters 18–21, the Way of Light and the Way of Darkness are characterized by types of moral behaviour that are typical of Hellenistic Jewish teaching. The characterization is largely negative; even in the section on the Way of Light, most of the instruction consists not of positive descriptions of virtue but of prohibitions, including condemnations of accepted Graeco-Roman practices of pederasty, abortion, and infanticide (19.4–5). Some of the material in this section is in literary relationship with passages in the



Figure 20.4 Restored façade of the second-century Temple of Hadrian at Ephesus. Photo C. Osiek.

Didache. Sorting out the relationship between the two documents has been by way of a long and torturous path, some scholars at one time arguing the priority of one or of the other; but the consensus today is that both share a common Jewish paraenetic source (J. Kloppenborg in Jefford 1995: 88–92).

The more startling part of *Barnabas* is the first 17 chapters. Here the author practises on the Hebrew Scriptures an allegorical method similar to that of Philo, though no direct influence of Philo can be detected. Probably a common Alexandrian allegorical training lies behind both authors. While Philo accepts cultic observances as part of the genuine meaning of the law, he leads reflection beyond practices to symbolic meaning. Barnabas bypasses the first level of cultic observance by arguing that it was never meant to be, that the Israelites misunderstood the entire message of the cultic law by observing it ritually. For example, animals forbidden to be eaten are really types of certain kinds of human behaviour which the faithful are to shun (10.3–8). Rather, allegorical interpretation was intended by God from the beginning. Therefore those who engage in such interpretation are the authentic interpreters and practitioners of the law and the covenant.

It is never explicitly said that ‘the former people’ are Jews and ‘this people’ are Christians (13.1) as the two terms are roughly juxtaposed in Ignatius (*Epistle to Magnesians* 10.3; *Epistle to the Philadelphians* 6.1), but much of the allegory is Christological, so there is no question that Christians are involved. Prophetic texts that critique cultic worship are cited as evidence that cult is not necessary. It is possible but not likely that the author simply represents a totally anticultic movement within Jewish Christianity. The polemic moves in an anti-Jewish direction. The Son of God came to fill up the sins of those who rejected the prophets (5.11). Their covenant has been broken so that the new covenant of Jesus might be sealed on our hearts (4.8). This author sees his group as quite distinct from Israel and as having superseded it.

The *Letter of Barnabas* is one of the first Christian writings that moves in a direction that was to appear increasingly in the second century, when one of the popular Christian literary genres was the treatise ‘against the Jews’, written to argue that the claims of Israel have now passed to Christians. The approximately contemporary Ignatius of Antioch would have approved.

The Letters of Ignatius of Antioch

The *Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* are ‘a battleground for most of the central issues of the development of early Christianity’ (Schoedel 1989: 462). They also have the most complicated manuscript history of any of the Apostolic Fathers, the collection occurring in three recensions, short, middle, and long. The modern scholarly consensus, not without challenges, is that the middle recension of seven letters represents the authentic Ignatius (Schoedel 1985). What we know of him is that he was bishop of Antioch in Syria, condemned to death in the East, brought under guard probably in a group of condemned prisoners to Rome, and there executed *ad bestias* (by wild animals in the amphitheatre) under Trajan about 110. Along the way, he was allowed visits from local church members, to whom he then wrote. From Smyrna, he writes back to the churches of Ephesus, Magnesia, and Tralles from



Figure 20.5 Second-century floor mosaic, from the Mosaic Museum, Antioch, depicting the evil eye attacked by various apotropaic instruments. Photo C. Osiek.

which he had received emissaries, and forward to the church of Rome to announce the terms of his visit. Later from Troas he writes back to the churches of Philadelphia, Smyrna, and a personal letter to the bishop of Smyrna, the famous Polycarp.

While in earlier times a collegial group alternately called *episkopoi* ('overseers') or *prebyteroi* ('elders') governed a local church, here in each of the communities to which Ignatius wrote, as in his own church at Antioch, a single leader called an *episkopos* has emerged, assisted by presbyters and deacons. For the first time, that term can be understood as 'bishop' with a meaning roughly equivalent to its meaning today. The notable exception to this pattern was Rome, for neither in *1 Clement* nor in *The Shepherd of Hermas*, nor in Ignatius' *Letter to the Romans*, is there any indication of other than the older style of collegial government there, and it is not until the last part of the second century that there is concrete evidence that the Roman leadership structure has changed.

'We do not often see life from the prisoner's point of view in antiquity' (Schoedel 1985: 111). To Ignatius his journey in captivity was like 'fighting wild animals', the military guards like leopards, giving worse treatment in exchange for kindness (*Rom.* 6.1). Yet he was able to think clearly through a number of issues. One of Ignatius' many concerns in most of his letters is that believers submit to the authority of the bishop and his presbyters (*Eph.* 6.1 [to the bishop as to the Lord himself]; *Magn.* 13.2; *Trall.* 7.2; *Phil.* 7; *Smyrn.* 8; *Pol.* 6). What is not known is whether this form of governance was already well in place throughout Asia Minor where he is passing, or whether only in specific churches in communion with his own church of Antioch, or whether Ignatius is actively promulgating this form of church government in other churches as he travels west. When he writes to Rome, not only does he make no mention of current church leaders there, referring only to the memory of the apostles Peter and Paul,¹³ but he also does not seek to foster the formation of any such leadership structures. Ignatius has no authority in Rome, where he comes begging them not to try to interfere in his martyrdom. By contrast, he does seem to have held at least the authority of a revered figure in the other churches to which he writes.



Figure 20.6 Peristyle of Terrace House B, a luxurious first- to second-century house in Ephesus. Photo C. Osiek.

Ignatius has two objectionable movements in mind, against which he speaks out forcibly, though it is also possible that each is an aspect of the other. One is the apparent desire of some gentile Christians in Philadelphia to adopt Jewish practices or beliefs. It must have been enticing to gentile converts taught through the Hebrew Scriptures to ‘go all the way’ into fuller Jewish observances, but Ignatius uses the strongest language up to his time in his denunciation of this tendency: ‘It is better to hear Christianity from a circumcised man than Judaism from an uncircumcised one’ (*Phil.* 6.1). He stands at that turning point in the relationship between Israel and the church in which the new movement turns its back on its roots, yet more and more claims their inheritance.

His other and greater objection is to the denial of the reality of the full incarnation of Christ, or ‘docetism’. The major issue for Ignatius is principally denial of his suffering and death, seen as the means of our redemption and resurrection (*Trall.* 10.1; *Smyrn.* 2–3). Without Christ’s suffering and death, Ignatius believes his own would have no meaning. The threat is immediate and personal. Instead, he awaits being devoured by animals as God’s wheat ground into the pure bread of Christ (*Rom.* 4.1). He was prepared to die, he wanted to die, and die he did.

Ignatius’ younger friend Polycarp became one of the most revered figures of the early church. Born about 70, he was reputed to have been a disciple of John at Ephesus.¹⁴ Irenaeus, later to become bishop of Lyons in Gaul, had known Polycarp when Irenaeus was a child. Polycarp became bishop at Smyrna early in the second century. At the age of about 40, he already held this position when Ignatius

passed through western Asia Minor on the way to his death in Rome about 110. Besides writing a letter to the Christian community of Smyrna, as he did in the case of others he visited, Ignatius also wrote an extant personal letter to its bishop, Polycarp. This letter contains advice about various points of church administration in the areas of his dealings with widows, slaves,¹⁵ and celibates,¹⁶ among others. It enjoins Polycarp to encourage wives and husbands towards mutual love (with no language of submission!),¹⁷ and the bishop should consent to their marriage (5.2). The letter is not quite totally private, however, for 6.1–7.1 gives instructions in the second person plural towards obedience to church leaders and mutual harmony.

The Letter of Polycarp

From Polycarp, one letter is extant, which may in fact be a composite of two letters.¹⁸ The *Letter of Polycarp* was written to the Philippian community, presumably at their request (3.1). The distance from Smyrna to Philippi across the north Aegean Sea was not great, and these two churches may have had regular contact. We have no letter of Ignatius to the Philippians, but there may be circumstantial evidence that he passed through: the city is on the direct route along the Via Egnatia (see Figure 20.7) that Ignatius must have taken to Rome from Troas, his last recorded location; and he is mentioned twice by Polycarp in the letter, first (9.1) as example ‘that you have seen with your eyes’, then several times in the final chapter, as one who with them wished to send letters to Syria, while they wished to have copies of Ignatius’ letters to other churches (13.1, 2).

The *Letter of Polycarp* is a good example of the adaptation of the New Testament household code, with its instructions to various household members about their mutual obligations, to the context of the church as extended household. Already observable in the Pastoral Epistles, this literary adaptation gives instructions to various members of the church. The androcentric perspective of the household codes remains, so that leading men are giving directions to the rest. Thus we (male leaders) should teach ‘ourselves’ to follow the Lord’s commands (4.1), then ‘our’ wives and widows (4.2–3), then deacons, young men, and virgins or young women (5.2–3). Finally, presbyters are admonished about their duties in 6.1. This format gives us a valuable insight into the way that the church was becoming a tight-knit society that could make the same claims on its members that kinship systems would make. Already at work in the Synoptic Gospels, this tendency became stronger rather than weaker in the second century.

The Martyrdom of Polycarp

Polycarp is best known not from his brief letter but from the account of his martyrdom that happened at Smyrna probably in 155 or 156, or perhaps as late as 167 (Lightfoot and Harmer [1891] 1989: 131–2) when he was 86 years old. The *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, though substantially reworked with theological themes, is our oldest Christian martyrdom account and is at its core undoubtedly authentic. Originally written as a letter from the church of Smyrna to that of Philomelium in Phrygia



Figure 20.7 Section of the Via Egnatia alongside the forum of Philippi, showing wheel grooves worn in the stone. Photo C. Osiek.

(prescript), the text soon became widely known. The testimony now found at the end of the manuscripts indicates the importance assigned to it in antiquity by those who revered the memory of Polycarp. There are several obvious additions, chs. 21–2, giving among other things the exact day of his death, 23 February (but not the year), and part of the manuscript’s history: copied by one Gaius from Irenaeus’ papers, then again from Gaius by Socrates of Corinth, then again by one Pionius of Smyrna, possibly to be identified with a martyr of the same name during the persecution of Decius in the middle of the third century. Eusebius paraphrases or quotes nearly the whole text (*H. E.* 4.15–46).

The account is a keystone in the shaping of the heroic tradition of the martyr. It is composed in such a way as to configure the sufferings of Polycarp to those of Christ. Yet intriguing details emerge. A dream vision of his pillow on fire tells him that he will be burnt alive (5). When the authorities come to arrest him late in the day, he orders a meal to be served to them while he has time to pray (7). During his public trial, when asked to renounce Christ, he says that he cannot renounce one he has served for 86 good years (9). The play on ‘atheism’ in the encounters of Christians and their world is brought out: while Christians consider others atheists for denying the one true God, the others consider Christians atheists for denying their gods (9.2). Yet miraculous elements are also present: when Polycarp’s lifeless body is stabbed, out of it come a dove and enough blood to quench the fire (16.1). The cooperation of Jews in doing away with him is strongly presented (12.2; 13.1; 17.2; 18.1). This first martyrdom account set the stage for many directions that were just



Figure 20.8 Roman agora at Smyrna (modern Izmir), restored after earthquake damage in 178 CE. Photo C. Osiek.

beginning: the glorification of martyrdom, Christian anti-Judaism, and the use of miraculous stories in the accounts of saints' lives and deaths.

CONCLUSION

The Apostolic Fathers represent just the beginning of what post-New Testament Christian literature was to become. In their diversity, these writers allow us to glimpse some of the ways in which Christianity was becoming inculturated in its world while at the same time creating for itself a new identity that was eventually to be a primary factor in the transformation of that same world.

NOTES

- ¹ The first two editions of the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (1958, 1974) remarked contemptuously that although 'full of reminiscences of the NT, they are on an altogether lower spiritual level'. The editor of the third edition, E.A. Livingstone (1997) has thought better of that judgement.
- ² J. B. Cotelier is usually credited with being the first user of the term in his *Patres, qui temporibus Apostolicis floruerunt* (Paris, 1672), but the credit should probably go to an archbishop of Canterbury, William Wake (1657–1737) with his prior use of 'Apostolical Fathers' (de Jonge 1978; Schoedel 1989).

- 3 For the texts, with introduction, discussion and bibliography, see Lightfoot and Harmer [1891] 1989, updated by Michael Holmes for the second edition of 1989. Jefford *et al.* (1996) provide summaries of contents, discussion and bibliography.
- 4 In the early empire, the *tria nomina* system was used by free Roman citizen males, whereby they had a *praenomen* or personal name (Titus), a *nomen* of family name (Flavius), and an additional name, a *cognomen* (Clemens). The freedman usually took the *praenomen* and *nomen* of his former owner and new patron, and used his own personal slave name as a *cognomen*. Thus a hypothetical freed slave of Titus Flavius Clemens named Eutyches would become Titus Flavius Eutyches, not Clement. The *cognomen* was more widely used even by those with no affinity. Nothing, therefore, can be proved certainly about the connection of a writer named Clement to this aristocratic family.
- 5 Most commentators assume on the basis of 1 *Clem.* 3.3 ('the young [rose up] against the old') that the Corinthian 'young Turks' have ousted the old guard in a generational coup, but the passage is part of a rhetorical cliché and must not be taken literally (Bowe 1988: 18–19).
- 6 The text meets the criteria for apocalyptic genre established by Collins (1979); cf. Osiek (1986).
- 7 Commentators have had various assessments of the historicity of biographical references, from total acceptance to the judgement that they are used allegorically to refer to the whole community (Dibelius 1923), to cautious optimism about the integration of personal details and literary motifs (Brox 1991), to total doubt that they are anything more than the literary strategy of the author (Peterson 1959).
- 8 *Vis.* 1.3.1; 2.3.1; *Man.* 3.5; specifically of Hermas; more generally, *Vis.* 3.11.3; *Man.* 10.1.4–5; *Sim.* 4.5, 7; 8.8.1–2 *passim.*; Osiek (1983). An interesting possible model for Hermas is Lucius Caecilius Jucundus, son of a freedman at Pompeii, owner of a spacious house, whose business records included 137 sales receipts and 16 rental receipts in a wooden chest.
- 9 A Jewish moral tradition widespread in the Hellenistic and Roman period; cf. Kraft (1965: 4–16); extensive discussion and bibliography in Osiek (1998, Introduction 3.3).
- 10 12.2: 'When the two will become one, and the outside as the inside, and the male with the female neither male nor female' (then the kingdom will come). Clement of Alexandria attributes the saying to the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, of which only such fragments quoted in other authors are known. The same saying appears in *Gospel of Thomas* 23 from Nag Hammadi. It is interesting to note that 2 *Clement* quotes the saying favourably and exegetes it for the rest of the chapter.
- 11 For further references and bibliography, see Schoedel (1989: 467–68).
- 12 The order cup-bread also appears in 1 Cor. 10:16–17 and Luke 22:17–18 in the western text, with the order cup-bread-cup in the majority of manuscripts. For discussion of this text-critical problem, see Fitzmyer (1985: 1388–9).
- 13 *Rom.* 4.3. After 1 *Clem.* 5.4–5, this is the second earliest mention of the tradition connecting these two apostles with Rome.
- 14 So Irenaeus quoted by Eusebius *H. E.* 5.20.5. There were a number of traditions about 'John', most eventually connected with Ephesus: John son of Zebedee, John the evangelist, John the presbyter (probably a different person, author of the Letters of John), and the named author of Revelation (Rev. 1:9). Later tradition tended to fuse them all into one figure.
- 15 Ignatius *Pol.* 4.3 tells Polycarp not to treat slaves arrogantly but, like all Christian literature of the time takes the institution of slavery for granted. Slaves are to continue in their service, and not to expect the church to post the money for them to buy their

- freedom—an intriguing insight into how slavery worked in the church at this time. See Harrill (1993).
- 16 Ignatius *Pol.* 5.2 instructs that anyone wishing to remain celibate (literally, *en hagneia*, 'innocent') 'out of reverence for the flesh of the Lord' should do so privately, making his or her intention known only to the bishop. This is one of the earliest references to the practice of deliberate and prolonged Christian celibacy.
- 17 It is characteristic of the Christian literature of this period, with one exception (1 *Clem.* 1.3) that the submission of wives to husbands, so prevalent in the later New Testament (Col. 3:18; Eph. 5:22–4; 1 Pet. 3:1–6) disappears. The language of submission remains, but it is now directed to all church members in their submission to church authority.
- 18 The final two chapters (13–14) sound as if they were written at a prior time, when Ignatius had just left and Polycarp is anxious to hear news of him. Yet earlier in the letter Ignatius seems to be a revered figure consigned with Paul among past heroes (9.1). Many scholars have suggested that chs. 13–14 were written first but added later to an earlier letter, resulting in what we now have. There is by no means consensus on this question (Lightfoot and Harmer [1891] 1989).

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THE APOLOGISTS



Eric Osborn

INTRODUCTION

The apologists who defended the Christian faith in the second Christian century have general importance and individual interest. They wrote in response to challenges from a pagan state, critical philosophers and Jewish hostility. In general, they joined Athens, Rome and Jerusalem in what became the culture of the Christian West.¹ Individually they present a variety of thinkers who demand patient analysis. Tatian, once dismissed by theologians, has been shown to be profound. Justin, long considered to be obtusely simple, has exploded in complex interest over the last 30 years.

Apologetic works with a logic of objection and rebuttal. Specific objections are met with specific rebuttals. Since objections come from very different sources, their rebuttals may not fit easily together. Against pagan accusations of immorality, Christians point to their ascetic habits. Against gnostic dualism, Christians affirm their enjoyment of the good creator's world. Resurrection and final judgement are set in opposition to Stoic cycles of existence; yet the patterns of nature's sunset and sunrise and of changing seasons point to the creator's resurrection activity. The punishment (according to their own prophets) of the Jews does not sit lightly with the Christian God of infinite love. To bring their rebuttals together, apologists need bridging concepts like logos, law, recapitulation and divine goodness.² It was necessary to bring their rebuttals together for their own integrity and because, unlike football teams, they did not play against pagans one week and philosophers the next week. Their ideas provided stimulus for all thinking Christians who shared their contributions. It could be argued that apologetic was the mother of Christian theology, if that title were not already assigned elsewhere.

Herein lies the claim of apologetic to be the mother of Christian theology. For theology (like philosophy) may be seen as a collection of problems or as a system of ideas. While most philosophers after Wittgenstein have disowned the pursuit of a system, some do not, and all recognize the need for coherence between their elucidation of diverse problems. A consideration of the apologists' problems does not provide ready-made answers to related problems in later centuries; rather it stimulates thought by fresh approaches and breaks down conceptual parochialism.

We shall consider problems which apologists tackled and note, from time to time, the ways in which they brought ideas together. These problems included the lateness of Jesus in human history, his relation to the truth found by Greek and Jew, divine transcendence and nearness, gods and one God, incarnation and resurrection. Finally, rebuttals of objections had to find common ground with objectors to make any impression; therefore the common picture of the apologist as defiant in isolation must be modified by something more subtle. The apologist is influenced by the objector and this influence is evident in his legacy. Just as *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit*, so Christian theology was tied, in different ways, to the mingling values of Greece, Rome and Israel.

Against what charges did apologists defend Christianity? To pagan Rome, Christians were atheists, disloyal to the state and sunk in secret depravity. To philosophers, Christians believed too much and thought too little. To Jews, the scandal of a crucified God sharpened Christian disobedience to the law of Moses. These three challenges were stiffened by Christian divisions – heresies which were to receive more thorough treatment from the continuing apologetic of Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian. Marcion presented more persistent problems than the objections of pagans and Jews.

Several apologists, whose works are lost, are mentioned in early Christian literature. Aristo of Pella wrote a *Disputation of Jason and Papiscus* in which a Christian and Jew argued concerning the fulfilment of Messianic prophecies. Miltiades, ‘sophist of the churches’, defended his Christian philosophy in an address to Roman rulers (Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.16; Tertullian, *Adversus Valentinianos* 5). Apollinarius of Hierapolis wrote a defence to Marcus Aurelius, as well as attacks on Greeks (i.e. pagans), Jews and Montanists (Eusebius, *HE* 4.27).

From Quadratus (*HE* 4.3.1–2), who wrote a defence to Hadrian, a surviving fragment testifies to the enduring effect of Jesus’ healing miracles on people who had survived to Quadratus’ own time! Aristides, an ‘Athenian philosopher’, presented an apology to Antoninus Pius. An eternal, impassible, perfect, creator God is proved by the order of the world. Of the four human races (Barbarians, Greeks, Jews and Christians), only Christians know and honour God by the moral excellence of their lives. His account of the divine attributes and his polemic against pagan gods have echoes of Philo, but a direct dependence is unlikely.

Another brief work, the anonymous *Epistle to Diognetus*, has drawn high praise. Probability places it in second-century Alexandria. It attacks idolatry, sacrifices and ritual (1–4) and describes the mystery of Christians in the world (5, 6). Marked by paradox, Christians are to the world what the soul is to the body: imprisoned in the world, they sustain the world, immortal they inhabit mortality. As the soul benefits from hunger and thirst, so persecuted Christians multiply. They cannot desert the post which God has entrusted to them. A catechetical summary (7–9) is followed by a final exhortation (10–12).

After Quadratus and Aristides, Justin is the most substantial and the earliest of the apologists. This means that the main apologist comes first; later writers are valuable, shorter and simpler.

JUSTIN

Justin was born in the early years of the second century at Flavia Neapolis (modern Nablus), in Samaritan Palestine (Figure 21.1). After some time in Ephesus, where he may have converted to Christianity, he lived and taught in Rome, where he founded a school which included Tatian among its pupils. Justin had moved through four schools of Greek philosophy (Stoic, Peripatetic, Pythagorean, Platonist), to the Christian ‘philosophy’ which was the primitive truth or *Urphilosophie* from which others had departed. He was still a young man, with this pilgrimage behind him, after the Bar Kochba revolt (132–5). The behaviour of Christian martyrs convinced him that slanders against them were false (2 *Apol.* 12.1). At some time between 162 and 168, he died as a martyr, so that he is commonly called Justin Martyr.

Two extensive works by Justin are extant, although we have titles and fragments of some others.³ The two apologies (the first of 68 chapters and the second of 15) written by Justin are one continuous work, presented to Antoninus Pius and his adopted sons about 153. His *Dialogue with Trypho* (between 155–60) first established the claim of Christian teaching as a philosophy and then presented this philosophy in a Christian-Jewish debate of which the intricacy is still being uncovered. It speaks to many groups of readers: to Christians, especially Marcionites, to philosophers and pagans (dedicated to Marcus Pompeius, *Dial.* 141), Jews to whom he makes his final appeal and to God-fearers, a neutral group of whom we have no clear picture. The fragments of his work *Concerning the Resurrection* (he is the first to speak of the resurrection of the flesh) may be taken as authentic, and the account of his



Figure 21.1 Nablus, the birthplace of Justin. From a lithograph in Keightley (1833: 114).

martyrdom is accepted as reliable. His writings have attracted much scholarly attention.⁴

Justin takes a guiding theme, the love of truth, from the apology of Socrates (who was, like Christians, condemned as an atheist), and bases his *Apology* to the emperor on their common ground of piety and philosophy (1 *Apol.* 1; 2; 3; 12; 2 *Apol.* 15). His theology is more extensive and elusive than that of other apologists. God is creator and lord, in whose word and law both truth and goodness find their perfection. Justin writes within a tradition of Christian teaching (1 *Apol.* 6; 13; 17; 46; 66), which stems from prophets, Christ and apostles (1 *Apol.* 39; 61; 66), having for its guarantee the divine teacher, the word and first born of God (1 *Apol.* 10; 13; 14; *Dial.* 58). This teaching, for all its authority, is not received by blind faith but defended by rational argument (2 *Apol.* 9). The elements of early Christian faith: incarnation, virgin birth, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension – are supplemented by other beliefs: hidden Messiah, mission of the apostles, faith of gentiles and faithless Israel's punishment. All these are established by scriptural *testimonia*, interpreted with the actuality of the Qumran Habakkuk commentary, where scripture foretells what is happening in the present. Justin owns and defends the name 'Christian', which could, by itself, be a ground of condemnation. The volume of work on Justin during the final third of the twentieth century has been enormous.⁵

What sort of a God do Christian atheists worship?

God is the good creator. The God of the Christians is the father of righteousness and all virtues (1 *Apol.* 6), father and maker of all (1 *Apol.* 8), concerned with the conduct of his rational creatures (1 *Apol.* 37) and caring for each individual (*Dial.* 1). In his goodness God made the world. There is a necessary connection between 'good' and 'unbegotten' (1 *Apol.* 14f.). God's goodness calls man to follow, imitating him in self-control, righteousness, love for men, and whatever else is fitting for God (1 *Apol.* 10).

No one stirred up more trouble in the early church than did Marcion when he divided the just inferior Jewish creator from the good Christian God of love. Central to the debate were the words of Jesus, 'There is none good but God'. Justin expands the verse with a reference to the creative activity of the only good God: 'None is good but God alone, who made all things' (1 *Apol.* 16.7). The great commandment is to love and serve the lord God 'who made you' (1 *Apol.* 16.7). When Justin calls Christ 'son of God', he adds, 'father of the universe' (1 *Apol.* 12). Against Marcion, he adds to certain Gospel citations (Mark 10:18 and 12:29), references to the creative action of God (1 *Apol.* 15.14; 16.7). (This is typical of his attitude to Gospel and apostolic writings which are not fixed as scripture but may be used in different forms; he works from some kind of Gospel harmony.)

The unchanging God ensures the constancy of nature, by his universal action (*Dial.* 3). He is above all change and corruption (1 *Apol.* 20). The Christian God made heaven and earth, for he is the only God, lord, creator and father. The Stoics say that God will be broken up into pieces when the world is made again, and the Sibyl thought that everything would disintegrate; but Christians insist that the first cause, God, is above contingency (1 *Apol.* 20 and *Dial.* 1).

God is lord. This is his biblical name and points to his activity throughout the saga of salvation. There is one God from all eternity who led the Hebrews out of Egypt and in him the Christians trust (*Dial.* 11). He is great and mighty, the terrible lord of lords and no respecter of persons (*Dial.* 16). God is spirit. Christians have abandoned false gods of matter for an unbegotten, impassible God (*1 Apol.* 25), who has moral qualities and no material needs (*1 Apol.* 10). He is seen by the mind, according to Plato, seen by that soul which has affinity with him (*Dial.* 4). The spirit speaks through the prophets and his many powers find unity in Christ (*Dial.* 88).

Father, son and spirit are one. For Justin the trinity is evoked at baptism (*1 Apol.* 61), Eucharist (*1 Apol.* 65), and confession at martyrdom (*Acts of Justin* 2.5f.). The father is the father of the universe which he created and preserves (*1 Apol.* 13.2). The son comes from the father and the holy spirit is not a gift but a divine power equal to father and son. The mystery of God is ever-present. At baptism the unnamed God is declared and yet remains ineffable (*1 Apol.* 61). The mystery of the cross is found in the blessing of Joseph and continues (*Dial.* 91).

Christians worship the most true God (*1 Apol.* 6) and him alone (*1 Apol.* 16f.). God cannot be named or spoken (*1 Apol.* 9 and 10), for 'God' is a designation not a name (*2 Apol.* 6). We cannot name God because the giver of a name must be older than the receiver, and there is no one older than God. So the names which we give to God are 'forms of address' which derive from his good activity (*2 Apol.* 6). Plato in the *Timaeus* tells us that it is hard to find the father and maker of all things and unsafe to talk about him (*2 Apol.* 10). God is the only unbegotten being, because whatever is unbegotten is identical with anything else that is unbegotten (*Dial.* 5). Negative theology was well established in Justin's day. For Albinus and Maximus of Tyre, the unknown God could be reached by the three ways of abstraction, analogy, eminence. The Christian mystery joined the transcendent God to the world by his goodness and creative power.

Christ as word, law, power

How did the transcendent creator make himself credible?

He was known by the saving power of his word. Jesus is the word (logos) of God, God's first-born, God himself, second to God in number but one with him in essence. He takes precedence over all else after God (*Dial.* 129.4). He is supremely and uniquely son of God (*2 Apol.* 13; *Dial.* 105.1; *1 Apol.* 23.2). He existed with the father before all things, as first-born and beginning of all things (*Dial.* 84.2; 85.2; 100.2; 125.3; 138.2; cf. Col. 1:15). The word remains God's word, just as our rational utterance remains ours and just as fire kindled from another fire does not diminish its source (*Dial.* 128.3f.). Appearing in the Old Testament as an angel, he has many names, such as king, priest, God, lord, angel, man, chief captain, stone, child, Joseph, Judah, star, Jacob, Israel. He is also the world soul which Plato declared to be marked with the sign of the cross (*1 Apol.* 60).

The purpose of Christ's incarnation and suffering was the healing of mankind

(2 *Apol.* 13) and his people will lack nothing (*Dial.* 15). His name and his wounds should be respected and not be derided, because it is by his stripes we are healed (*Dial.* 137). To reject Christ is to reject the God who sent him (*Dial.* 136).

In statements of belief, Justin joins the twofold pattern of cross and resurrection with a threefold scheme: pre-existence, incarnation, exaltation. He speaks of Jesus' birth 'through' rather than 'from' a virgin, of the fullness (2 *Apol.* 10.1) of his humanity, and is the first to integrate both patterns (1 *Apol.* 21.1). Christ was always lord and God. He did not achieve this status by his resurrection. His pre-existence illuminates three areas of his activity: prior to creation when he is numerically distinct from the father, the Old Testament theophanies which hint of an incarnation, and the pagan world where he is both *nomos* and *logos*, as well as the formidable destroyer of demons.

Law

Christ is the new, eternal law of God, given to all the human race (*Dial.* 11). The same God gave both old law and new; Marcion had separated old and new, dissociated the most high God of Jesus from the creator God and thereby threatened the link between God and world. The God of the Exodus had to be the God of the Christians. From the same God, Christians have received his final law and a supreme covenant. The law of Horeb is replaced, and the new covenant annuls all earlier covenants. 'Christ was given to us, an eternal and final law and the faithful covenant, after which there shall be no law, no precept, no commandment.' Isaiah had spoken of a new law being sent forth from Jerusalem, Jeremiah had foretold the new covenant. This new covenant is authenticated because men abandon idols and sins to find God through the name of the crucified Jesus Christ, and to seal their faith with blood. Such evidence and many wonders prove that this is the new covenant which God promised. 'He is the new law and the new covenant and the expectation of those who out of all nations wait for the good things of God.' From the new law and covenant comes a new Israel which is the church. 'For we who have been led to God by this crucified Messiah are the true, spiritual Israel, the stock of Judah, Jacob, Isaac and Abraham.'

Power

The sovereign rule of Christus Victor requires that salvation continue until God becomes all in all. The power of Christ may be seen in martyrs who confess faith in his saving name (2 *Apol.* 10), just as it was evident in Joshua who was able to stop the sun (*Dial.* 132). That Jesus is the Christ is proved by his power (*Dial.* 8.4; 142.3). The power of God is the cause of his birth (*Dial.* 105; 1 *Apol.* 32.9–13) and in particular of his blood (1 *Apol.* 32). His words have power (1 *Apol.* 22; *Dial.* 102; 1 *Apol.* 15) as does his cross (1 *Apol.* 35 and 55; *Dial.* 13.1; 138), and his name (*Dial.* 115; 132; 30). Jesus derives his name from the saving power he shows in conquest of Satan (*Dial.* 125). The 12 apostles depend on the power of Christ, the eternal priest, and by this power they went out to all nations (*Dial.* 42; 1 *Apol.* 50). Already, through his power, his followers leave the worship of idols (*Dial.* 11.4) and exorcise

demons (2 *Apol.* 6). At his second coming they will be saved as he destroys all sin and death (*Dial.* 45).

Word and scripture

Where do we learn of God's saving word?

The scriptures declare his coming as the climax of salvation history. He is the Omega point of creation and salvation. Justin applies the theme of fulfilment to both scripture and reason. In scripture and in philosophy, there is a primeval fall, evolution and final correction and restoration. Jesus fulfils and completes the scriptural economy of salvation. He also perfects the truth and completes the reason which is in every human. This means that the work and person of Christ are anticipated in Heraclitus and Socrates as well as in Abraham and Elijah.

The idea of recapitulation which dominates Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clement is also Justin's theme. Irenaeus records that in Justin's lost work against Marcion, Justin wrote 'from one God who made this world, who fashioned us and who contains and governs all things, the only begotten son came to us, summing up his own workmanship in himself' (*Adversus Haereses* 4.6.2). The theme of recapitulation has been found in *Dial.* 45; 79–81; 100.

Justin's use of Old Testament prophecy is predictable in his Jewish encounter; its centrality in his *Apology* to pagans is a surprise. Here he finds overwhelming proof of the divine origin and truth of Christianity. What is hidden in scripture is brought to light by the events of the gospel. Jesus fulfils all that was foretold of the one who was to come. The prophets foretold all the details of Christ, his birth, his growth as a man, his miracles of healing, his rejection, his death and his ascension to be the Son of God (1 *Apol.* 31). Moses, the first prophet, spoke of him as the desire of nations who would bind the foal to the vine and wash his robe in the blood of the grape (1 *Apol.* 32). Isaiah foretold that the gentiles who were not expecting him would receive him, while the Jews would not recognize him, but reject him (1 *Apol.* 49). Even Plato took from Moses the shape of the cross as the sign of salvation (1 *Apol.* 60).

Drawing on earlier collections of *testimonia*, Justin applies a threefold pattern: citation, explanation and visible realization. The devastation of Judaea, long foretold, is seen by his readers (1 *Apol.* 47–9). From these and many other facts, his refrain is 'you can learn' (1 *Apol.* 28; 34; 35; 37; 48; 63). His use of scripture has points of similarity with Philo but a general view which is quite different. In the *Dialogue*, he blames the woes of the Jews on their rejection of Christ (*Dial.* 16; 108; 117; 133; 136), using their scriptures rather than the good news of Jesus. Yet there is hope, for the prophets foretold two advents (1 *Apol.* 52 and *Dial.* 32) and God has delayed the end because there are still some who will repent (1 *Apol.* 28). Malachi spoke of the sacrifice offered through the world from men of every race; these sacrifices were the prayers and the thanksgiving of Christians (*Dial.* 117).

Objections are raised by Trypho against the linking of the historical Jesus with ancient theophanies. This continuity is impossible because of the shameful cross (*Dial.* 38). Justin argues to show the presence of Christ in many places throughout

the scriptures, where the continuous activity of God is a consequence of divine unity. There will be no inheritance in the mountain of God except through Christ (*Dial.* 25).

To summarize, in the *Apology* (31–53), testimonies point to the passion, the enthroned Christ, the apostolic *kerygma*, the disbelief of the Jews and the consequent ruin of Judaea; they also denigrate the Jewish cult. In the *Dialogue*, Justin adds the theophanies, Pauline argument on Deut. 21:23, comment on Psalm 22 and accounts of recapitulation.

Justin thinks in terms of a Christian Bible, when he moves on from philosophers who talk ignorantly about God. 'I choose not to follow men and human doctrines, but God and what he has taught' (*Dial.* 80.3). Every word of scripture conveys God's power and presence. Salvation history solves the question of the Mosaic law which is rendered obsolete by the new eternal law of Christ (*Dial.* 11.2). The whole of scripture may be appropriated because there is one God who has spoken in different times and places. The unity of scripture was a Jewish idea which Justin turned into a principle of Christian theology. He succeeded through his perception of an imaginative unity in scripture. The richness of imagery and mass of scriptural references point to the fullness of the Christ who has fulfilled the words of the prophets. In all his scriptural argument, the interest for later readers is not historical validation or literal proof, but the way in which reborn images point to Christ and illuminate his meaning.

Word and truth

The universal God's concern for the whole human race

A universal God cannot belong to one nation. All humans are created and indwelt by the logos. Philosophers shared in logos (2 *Apol.* 10.2) and Plato spoke of the power of the cross (1 *Apol.* 60). The prophets announced Christ (1 *Apol.* 31.7f.) who is the lord of hosts (*Dial.* 36.2; 85.1). The word who appeared to Moses as man and angel (*Dial.* 128) was rejected by the Jewish people (*Dial.* 38.2).

Logos and Conflict (1 *Apol.* 46)

Logos is the ground of Christian persecution as logos was the cause of Socrates' trial and death. Throughout history, sin is opposition to logos and reaches its lowest point, not in the fall of Adam but in the crucifixion of the logos himself (1 *Apol.* 46; *Dial.* 93). The case of Socrates shows that there were Christians before Christ. The first-born of God, is 'the logos in whom every race of men participated; those who lived *meta logou* were Christians even though they were considered to be atheists'. Justin's examples include the Greeks: Socrates, Heraclitus, and the barbarians: Abraham, Ananias, Azarias, Misael, Elijah—heroes of monotheism. On the other hand, those who chose to reject reason were hostile to all who lived reasonably. Those who have lived and now live with logos are Christians, fearless and unperturbed.

Logos, parts and whole (2 Apol. 8–10)

The Stoics, who are admired for their moral teaching, were hated and put to death. To a lesser extent the poets suffered the same fate. The explanation is 'the *logos spermatikos* implanted in every race of men'. The devils always work so that those who live a rational, earnest and virtuous life should be hated. If this happens to those who follow a part of spermatik logos, any whose lives are governed by the knowledge and contemplation of the whole logos, who is Christ, will meet with greater hostility and hatred.

For our sakes, Christ, the whole logos, became body, logos and soul. Good philosophers and legislators had found some part of the logos and said good things. When they tried to prove things by reason, they were charged with impiety. Socrates, the prime example, knew Christ in part and therefore faced the same charges as Christians: that he introduced new gods and denied the gods of the state. He had expelled Homer and other poets, opposed demons and exhorted men to know, through rational investigation, the father and maker of all. Christ by his power declared the God whom reason sought but could not reach; he is greater than Socrates because many who are unlearned follow him to death. This happens because he is the power of the ineffable father of whom Socrates spoke, and not just a construction of human logos (2 Apol. 10).

Logos as seed, imitation, participation of reality (2 Apol. 13)

The demons have distorted and ridiculed Christian teachings. When Justin realized what had happened, he turned his laughter against the false fabrications of the demons. He now proudly strives to be a Christian and to possess the whole of which Plato, Stoics, poets and historians had a part. Each of these pronounced his share of spermatik logos but fell short of full knowledge. The central principle of the eclecticism which dominates all Christian apologists is enunciated by Justin: 'whatever, among all men, has been well said, belongs to us Christians', who worship and love the logos who is from the unbegotten and ineffable God, since he for our sakes shared human suffering and brought healing. The ancient writers possessed a dim perception of reality thanks to the seed of logos which was in them. This seed, copy, imitation is distinct from the thing itself, which is participated and copied.

The idea of spermatik logos speaks to philosophers, Jews and pagans. While the parable of the sower, Philo and Numenius may have contributed to Justin's idea, he owed most to Stoic philosophy where spermatik logos holds a central place in the physical universe. For the Stoic, divine power is found in reason (*ratio*), mind (*animus*) and universal intellect (*mens*; Cicero, *Natura Deorum* 1.39–41 = SVF 2.1077). According to the Hymn of Cleanthes, 'all things share in a single everlasting logos' (Stob. 1.25–7 = SVF 1.537). God is intelligent, a designing fire which creates the world and encompasses all *logoi spermatikoi* which determine what happens according to fate (Aetius 1.7.33 = SVF. 2.1027). According to Zeno, 'Just as the sperm is enveloped in the seminal fluid, so God, who is the spermatik logos of the world, stays behind as such in the moisture making matter serviceable to himself for the successive stages of creation' (DL 7.136 = SVF 1.102). Eclectics modify the ideas

which they use; in this case Justin replaces Stoic physicalism with idealism and subjects all to the perfection of Christ who is the entire logos.

Morals, perfection and philosophy

What about the morals of Christian atheists? Do they fit the God they claim to worship?

Justin's apology depends upon the emperor being a guardian of justice and of learning. Both those who rule and those who are ruled must follow piety and philosophy (1 *Apol.* 3). The love of truth is more important than life itself (1 *Apol.* 2). It would be easy for Christians to deny their faith 'but we would not live by telling a lie' (1 *Apol.* 8). The lives of Christians disprove demonic slanders. For Christians have abandoned immorality, magic and the pursuit of wealth. They now practise chastity, obedience to God and communal sharing. Once they hated and destroyed one another, now they live in friendship and pray for their enemies (1 *Apol.* 14). The case for Christians comes down to: 'Do not decree death against those who have done no wrong' (1 *Apol.* 68).

The temporary law given to Moses was imperfect and the prophets require spiritual circumcision of the heart (*Dial.* 15). The food laws of the Jews are wrong; Christians eat all green herbs unless they are bitter or poisonous (*Dial.* 20). The sabbath, like other laws, was given because the Jews had not lived righteous lives (*Dial.* 21) and sacrifices aimed to keep the people from idolatry and sin (*Dial.* 22). Among Christians there was division over whether food offered to idols could be eaten by Christians. For some, following Paul, an idol was nothing and could not contaminate food. For others, to eat such food was to confess the idol to whom it had been dedicated. Justin insists that true Christians do not eat food offered to idols; but he admits that some Christians commit this error (*Dial.* 35). He also takes a more tolerant line than Paul on the Mosaic law: if a Christian keep the law for the sake of his own conscience and does not try to impose its requirements on others, then he does nothing wrong.

Paul (Gal. 3:10–14) argued that the curse which is on all who have not kept the whole law has been taken over by Christ who died an accursed death on the cross. Justin reports a different and hostile use of Deut. 27:26 and 21:23 (*Dial.* 95f.): the curse on Christians who do not keep the whole law is a daily pronouncement in the synagogues and, in the eyes of their enemies, causes their persecution. For Jews, the curse on the crucified Jesus only intensifies the curse on the Christians who follow him.

God's universal justice implants in all the knowledge of right and wrong, and is summed up in the teaching of Jesus concerning the love of God and the love of neighbour (*Dial.* 93). The gift of reason is linked with universal law. God made humans free to choose the right and gave them reason by which they might know their creator and a law by which they should be judged if they acted against reason (*Dial.* 93; 1 *Apol.* 28). The unicity of God, evident in one law, is confirmed by the one commandment which sums up the whole law, the command to love God and neighbour. Jesus brought all righteousness and piety together, 'For he who loves

God with all his heart and might, being full of a mind that is turned to God will honour no other as God . . . He who loves his neighbour as himself will desire for him the good that he desires for himself . . . Now a man's neighbour is none other than man, that living rational creature with similar feelings to himself (*Dial.* 93).

The love command reveals that God is good, just and creator, and that men are his children and brothers to one another (*Dial.* 96.2f.). Christians pray for their persecutors, with the goodness of the heavenly father who sends sunshine and rain on saint and sinner alike. Love of enemies is distinctively Christian and derives from the one God. Justin points to the newness of love for enemies in contrast to harlots who love and tax-collectors who give for the sake of reward (1 *Apol.* 15). The Christian claim for moral excellence is hammered home. The teaching of Jesus shows rigour and lack of compromise. Eye is to be plucked out, or hand is to be cut off; love of enemies, giving to those who are in need, kindness and mercy define the Christian life. Adultery in the heart is condemned, marriage of divorced people is not allowed (1 *Apol.* 15). The continence of Christians is well known: a Christian of Alexandria requested permission to be made a eunuch (1 *Apol.* 29). The latter section of Justin's apology is provoked by the disastrous effect which the new morality of a Christian woman had upon her pagan husband (2 *Apol.* 3). To be a Christian is Justin's boast and first endeavour (2 *Apol.* 13), and the only just criticism to be levelled against Christians is that they do not follow the law of Moses. The accusations of cannibalism and promiscuity are absurd (*Dial.* 10); Christian excess is in the opposite direction, towards an impossible perfection, according to Trypho who has read the Gospel precepts and describes them as too difficult. The claim of the Sermon on the Mount is a call to perfection (Matt. 5:48).

Martyrdom and caring concern are two evidences of Christian love. Christians do no wrong but are punished by death for their name alone (1 *Apol.* 24). Jews, no less than Romans, kill Christians when they have the power; in the Jewish war Bar Kochba gave orders that Christians should be cruelly punished unless they blasphemed Christ (1 *Apol.* 31). The Christian faces death without fear because all must die and he knows that, to all eternity, he will be free from suffering or need (1 *Apol.* 57). The behaviour of Christians in the face of death convinced Justin that they were not immoral people: he himself became a Christian because of what he saw (2 *Apol.* 12). Justin speaks about the caring concern of Christians who provide for sick and needy members and always stand by one another (1 *Apol.* 14; 67). He makes his plea for Christians 'as one of them' (1 *Apol.* 1).

Christian worship is open to scrutiny. What do Christians do? Baptism is preceded by preparation, a commitment to Christian doctrine and life, fasting and prayer for remission of sins. Washing with water in the threefold name brings regeneration into a life of free choice and knowledge which replaces the necessity and ignorance of natural birth (1 *Apol.* 61). Welcomed into the community with fervent prayers and the kiss of peace, the believer receives the Eucharist from the hands of deacons after the president has given thanks with bread and wine mixed with water (1 *Apol.* 65). These are received, in accordance with his words of institution, as the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ who became incarnate for mankind's salvation, and not as common bread and wine (1 *Apol.* 66).

For Sunday worship, those in cities or in the country come together. The

'memoirs of the apostles' and the prophets are read as a basis for instruction and exhortation, the people stand for prayer, bread and wine are brought for the prayers and thanksgivings of the president. The congregation shares in the bread and wine and some is set aside for those who are absent. A collection is taken and distributed among all kinds of needy people by the president. This service happens on Sunday, the day of creation and resurrection, when darkness changed to light (1 *Apol.* 67).

How can such ignorant people claim to be philosophers?

They are ruled by a love of truth and have found the primitive true philosophy. Justin's theme of 'love of truth' is linked with his claim that Christianity is the only worthwhile philosophy. The *Dialogue* begins from the question of philosophy because Justin is wearing a philosopher's cloak. Justin agrees that philosophy is inquiry about God and that it was sent down by God, but adds that most philosophers (the Greeks) have not pursued this purpose and have departed from the divine gift (*Dial.* 2). Philosophy began as one science (*Urphilosophie*) but split into many schools named after their founders. In this decline philosophers resemble the heretics who have departed from one truth under the names of their different teachers. Justin endeavoured to climb back to the true original philosophy through the plurality of the schools. Of these the most promising was Platonism, which in turn came to grief when its account of knowledge and of the soul was examined. Philosophers cannot speak truth about God because they have no knowledge of him, having never seen or heard him. Plato's account of the immortal soul leaves no difference between the soul and God. The primordial true philosophy is to be found in the Old Testament revelation and in Christian teaching. In the prophets and the friends of Christ, Justin found the only safe and profitable philosophy, and, having thus regained primitive divine truth he is a philosopher (*Dial.* 8).

The claim that Christianity is true philosophy and not an evil, depraved superstition, challenged other philosophies and exposed Christians to the criticism of philosophers like Celsus. Justin himself took his place against Crescens in philosophical debate in Rome; his whole work argues the truth of Christianity, which he defends and commends. Philosophy was a way of life, to be expressed in the practice of critical thought and in distinctive conclusions. Elements of Hellenistic Judaism, such as the titles given to the logos, are everywhere; but they cannot be traced directly to Philo whose outlook differs widely from that of Justin. They point to the eclecticism which pervades the apologists.

TATIAN

Tatian, 'the Syrian', was born (about 125–30) of a Syrian family in Mesopotamia and received a thorough education in the contemporary Greek tradition. After conversion in Rome about 160, he became an appreciative pupil of Justin (*Oration to the Greeks* 18). After Justin's death (between 162 and 168 CE), he taught in Rome, under threat from the Cynic Crescens who had brought about Justin's death. Break-



Figure 21.2 The Roman forum in the eighteenth century. Etching by Giambattista Piranesi, pre 1778.⁶

ing with the church in Rome in 172, he returned home to establish the Eastern Syrian church. After Justin's death, he turned, according to Irenaeus (*Ad. Haer.* 1.28), to gnostic heresy and founded a sect of Encratites, 'Abstinentes' (*Ad. Haer.* 3.23.8), which condemned matrimony as adultery, together with all consumption of meat and wine. Nothing is known of his death.

Two works by Tatian are extant.⁷ His *Oration to the Greeks* (*Oratio ad Graecos*) is a teaching lecture rather than an apology. His *Diatessaron*, a harmony of four Gospels, was used by Syriac churches until the fifth century when it gave way to the four Gospels. It is accessible only through later translations.⁸ He mentions other works (*Or.* 15f.) and promises a work on wrong ideas about God (*Or.* 40). He has been the subject of a reasonable amount of scholarship in recent years.⁹

Can christianity be true and every other account be wrong?

The theme of his oration is that truth is divine, ancient and one, set over against the many versions of falsehood. Justin was prepared to find seeds of truth in all men, including 'Christians before Christ'; but no such concessions are to be found in Tatian. Truth is received as tradition. The first person pronoun plural persists: what 'we' have learnt (*Oratio ad Graecos* 9.2; 20.2), received (*Or.* 5.1) know (*Or.* 5.1; 12.1; 30.1; 36.2) and possess is the truth. We are distinguished by 'our' teachings,

philosophy, knowledge, way of life, laws, records, and prophets. The unity of truth shapes the treatise. Tatian first destroys the truth claims of Greek philosophy (*Or.* 1–4), then proceeds to prove the truth of Christianity, first from its content (*Or.* 5–30) then from its age (*Or.* 31–41). He concludes (*Or.* 42) with a personal testimony.

The unity of God is described in the language of Middle Platonism. From the divine simplicity, by an act of will, the creative *logos* proceeds. Spirit is the stuff of which both God and the *logos* consist. Matter is not eternal but created by God. The soul is never separate from the body or flesh (*Or.* 15.1) and its free will is the source of evil. Both angels and men were created by God and both fell through disobedience into sin (*Or.* 15.4). Demons are active in many ways and are immortal because they have no bodies. Humans are immortal because they have the image and likeness of God.

God exists from eternity, the unique and unbegun beginning. Creator of all things visible and tangible, beyond our sight and touch, he is known from the things which he has created. He does not need the worship, which we owe to him alone and never to the things which he has created for us. The *logos* (*Or.* 5) springs from the will of the father (cf. Justin, *Dial.* 61 and 128) as one flame is kindled from another. The *logos* can be considered in a twofold state (*Or.* 7): before creation he is within God as a power and at creation he proceeds from the father to be the first-born work of the father. Yet there is no separation between father and *logos*; Christ is God in human form (*Or.* 21), and the God who has suffered (*Or.* 13). The spirit of God dwells in the souls of the just, is the source of their sanctity and, through the prophets, the revealer of things to come (*Or.* 13). Evil comes from freely chosen sin of men who were made to live and not to die (*Or.* 11).

Irenaeus (*Ad. Haer.* 1.28) uses Tatian as an example of how heresy came from the desire to teach something new. He copied the Valentinians in his account of aeons and Marcion in condemning marriage, but was entirely original in denying the salvation of Adam. Some probability is given to Irenaeus' account by a second reference to Tatian (*Ad. Haer.* 3.23.8) within an exposition of recapitulation. Tatian's novelty (Adam's perpetual damnation) showed that he had missed the central point of Paul who declared the universality of death (1 Cor. 15:22) and the saving sovereignty of grace (Rom. 5:20). However, this is unlikely for someone who insisted on the theme of recapitulation that 'for everyone who has been conquered it is possible again to conquer' (*Or.* 15).

Tatian's claim for exclusive truth lacks Justin's universal vision; but it remains subtle and deeply sincere. He speaks from first-hand knowledge of human rhetoric, many lands, arts and inventions. Saying farewell to the arrogance of Rome and the trivial inconsistency of Athens, he accepts the Christian barbaric philosophy. He asks that he be heard and not ridiculed. Sharing a common human rationality he tries to reason with those who are plainly ignorant. As a wise Greek said, 'How can it be irrational . . . to be ever learning in all directions as one grows older?' (*Or.* 35).

ATHENAGORAS

Athenagoras, the ‘Christian philosopher from Athens’, of whose life we know virtually nothing, is credited with two works of Christian apologetic: one an apology called the *Presbeia* or *Legatio* and the other a defence of Christian belief in resurrection (*De Resurrectione*).¹⁰ The latter faces a serious challenge to its authenticity; but both works are contributions to the apologetic movement. The former is an impressive literary achievement, directed (c. 177 CE) to Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, from a philosopher to philosopher kings, and through them to the wider public. It turns back charges of atheism and moral depravity to declare an exalted God and a stringent ethic. Ethics and divine transcendence are joined by use of the Sermon on the Mount which enjoins the love of enemies by the children of a transcendent loving God.¹¹

What do Christian atheists think about God?

Christians have done no wrong and should never be punished for their name. The charges of atheism, Thyestian meals and Oedipodean intercourse have no foundation; if they were true, Christians would request their own destruction. There have been proper atheists like Diagoras who denied all divine existence and burnt a statue of Hercules to boil his turnips; but Christians teach one uncreated, transcendent God, creator of all things by his word. Here they share the opinions of poets, philosophers, and prophets and should not be singled out for punishment.

Against the absurdity of many gods, Christian faith claims rational support.



Figure 21.3 The Acropolis in Athens today. Photo Eric Osborn.

There must be one God because two gods would have to be either alike or unlike; to be alike they would have to participate in one higher pattern which is impossible because there is nothing above them. (Nor can God be a composite unity for he is indivisible and has no parts.) To be independent and unlike would leave one of them unplaceable, because he could not fit into or around the other's world nor could he be given another world since one God controls the only one we know. There is no place to put a second God because God fills all things. Nor could a second god exercise providence, since he has created nothing over which he might rule.

All these human arguments receive necessary support from the prophets who spoke as the divine spirit moved them concerning that only God, who may be grasped by mind and reason (*Legatio* 7; 9). Negatively, God is uncreated (*Leg.* 4; 8. 10; 22; 23; 30), unlimited by time, eternal (*Leg.* 4; 10; 22; 23; 30), invisible (*Leg.* 10; 16), impassible (*Leg.* 10; 29), incomprehensible and infinite. Positively, he rules the universe which he created and ordered, ever surrounded by light, beauty, spirit and ineffable power (*Leg.* 10). The Stoic account of God held the same balance between positive and negative theology as we find in Christian writing.

Yet the god of the philosophers could vanish in negative transcendence. This cannot happen to the one God of the Christians who has a son and holy spirit within his unity. The divine son is no pagan procreation, but the word of the father, ideal in form and energizing power. The son is in the father and the father in the son, through the unity and power of the spirit. He is God's mind and reason, proceeding for the work of creation as the spirit flows out to speak in the prophets (*Leg.* 10).

What kind of life does their God require?

Moral excellence supports these doctrines, whose followers love their enemies, reflecting the love of the God whom they worship in contrast to the philosophers who are forever fighting and playing verbal games; believers are often uneducated people whose lives, rather than their words, prove the excellence of their faith (*Leg.* 11). The purity of Christian character is inspired from the certainty of final, universal judgement; even loss of earthly life on earth is far outweighed by rewards to those who serve the great judge with meekness, kindness and love for enemies. All this they do entirely from faith in one God, spirit, son and father, united in threeness, distinct in unity. They know the mystery of this triune God.

There is every difference between those who indulge in worldly pleasures and those whose selfless love looks to a future life which surpasses all description. Selective as this account of Christian faith may be, says Athenagoras, it is enough to show the quality of Christian excellence, just as a small sample of honey can demonstrate the goodness of the whole (*Leg.* 12).

Yet all arguments may be ineffective, because those who brand Christians as atheists are often innocent of concepts and are offended solely by Christian refusal to sacrifice. This refusal can be explained: God does not need blood, fat, flowers or incense (*Leg.* 13), but delights in holy prayers and rational worship. Further, Christian denial of civic gods is not culpable, because there is no agreement as to who these gods are (*Leg.* 14); in any case, Christians could not worship mere matter which is quite distinct from God (*Leg.* 15). Even the grandeur and beauty of the world

(always important to Athenagoras) do not deserve that worship which is due to their maker alone. Honour is due to an emperor not to his palace (*Leg.* 16). Even the gods behind the statues had a beginning and must have an end. Plato made this clear with his distinction between the world of the intellect and the world of sense; the former exists always while the latter has a beginning and an end (*Leg.* 19). Gods with bodies are ridiculous and their sexual sallies are only part of their incredible antics (*Leg.* 21f.). When all alternative accounts of the gods are considered, there remains no ground for banishing Christians (*Leg.* 24). Father, son and holy spirit are one in power and distinguished in rank. Set against them are created powers who revolted against God and who include the 'prince of matter' and the angels who fell because of their lust (*Leg.* 25). Athenagoras ends on moral matters. Even the lustful look is condemned among Christians. Kissing for pleasure can deprive us of eternal life (*Leg.* 32). Murder is impossible for Christians who even reject abortion (*Leg.* 35).

For such a brief work, there is an extensive account of the Christian God. His goodness is as much a part of him as is the surface of a body and the blue of the sky or the gold of a fire (*Leg.* 24). The one God is father, son and spirit (*Leg.* 10). Unity (*henotes, henosis, koinonia*; *Leg.* 12) points to power (*dunamis*) while distinction (*diairesis*; *Leg.* 10; 12) points to order (*taxis*). The holy spirit is an emanation of God (*Leg.* 24) flowing out and returning like the rays of the sun (*Leg.* 10). Logos may refer to a divine person (*Leg.* 4; 10; 12; 18; 30), to the divine attribute of reason (*Leg.* 16), to a cosmic power (*Leg.* 25; 3; *De Resurrectione* 25) or to a divine function (*Leg.* 10; 24). Similarly, *pneuma* may refer to a divine person (*Leg.* 7; 9; 10), a divine attribute (*Leg.* 10; 16) or a cosmic power (*Leg.* 5; 10). The father is the source of the son (*Leg.* 4; 18; 10) and of the spirit (*Leg.* 24), yet the three persons are equal (*Leg.* 10; 24). The distinction between God's inner and uttered Logos (thought and speech) is maintained without the Stoic terminology (*Leg.* 10). The logos brings order to the cosmos (*Leg.* 10; cf. Albinus, *Epitome* 10.2). The spirit inspires the prophets (*Leg.* 7; 9; 10), is holy (*Leg.* 10) and divine (*Leg.* 7; 9). While Athenagoras declares the reality of the triune God, he subordinates the son to the father and, like Justin, does not satisfy later standards concerning the equality of three persons. The same may be said of parts of the New Testament; early Christian writers are transmitting a pluriform tradition.

How can Christians believe in the resurrection?

The first half (1–11) of *De Resurrectione* answers objections. God has both the power and the will to raise the dead. His creation proves that he has the power, and his will to raise is neither unjust nor unworthy. There is no force in the objections that human bodies may become parts of other bodies or that what is broken into parts cannot be restored to wholeness. God can overcome these obstacles. In the second part of the work (12–25), there are positive arguments for resurrection. Man was made in God's image to know and to look on him forever. As both soul and body, he cannot achieve the end of his rational life without a body. Nor can he be rightly judged except as body and soul for these act together and should be judged together. Only beyond this world can the true end of human life be achieved.

Creation points to resurrection, for the God who knew the first formation of

things would be able to put them together. He is able to raise the dead because he had the power to create their bodies in the first place. He, who gave shape to matter and brought life into being, may be looked to once again to raise men to new life (*Res.* 2). (This link of creation with resurrection goes back to Paul and the great antitheses of Romans 4 – justification of the ungodly, creation *ex nihilo* and resurrection of the dead.)

In summary, the two works present a coherent account of God as one (*Leg.* 4; 6), provable (*Leg.* 8), triune (*Leg.* 10), and providential (*Leg.* 25; *Res.* 18), as well as of angels (*Leg.* 10; 24), demons (*Leg.* 24ff.), giants (*Leg.* 24) and Satan (*Leg.* 24f.). Man is marked by reason (*Leg.* 25; *Res.* 12; 15), permanence and discontinuity (*Res.* 16), possessed of body and soul (*Res.* 12; 15f.), and freewill (*Leg.* 24) from whence comes evil in the world. While Athenagoras has many echoes of Philo, he represents an encounter with Greek philosophy which is independent of any earlier interaction between Greek philosophy and Judaism.

THEOPHILUS OF ANTIOCH

Theophilus, from 169, bishop of Antioch, the city on the Orontes river in Syria, follows the same aims as Athenagoras. He was of gentile parents and received a Hellenistic education, only converting to Christianity as a mature adult after long consideration of the scriptures. Of his many writings only the three books of *Ad Autolycum*, composed shortly after 180 CE, survive.¹² Here Theophilus defends Christianity against the objections of his gentile friend Autolycus, who had praised the pagan gods and denigrated the name of Christians and of their God. His work lacks elegance and order but is no less useful for that. If he is less able to bring his material into conceptual unity, this means that we have greater access to raw materials from which he thought.

What sort of God, if any, do Christians worship?

How can Theophilus show the Christian God in a way accessible to the worshipper of idols? Perception is a matter of distinguishing opposites from one another. God may be seen by souls whose eyes have been opened and may be heard by hearts which can hear. Those who cannot see God are no different from the blind who cannot see the sun, for all its brightness. The mirror of the soul must be polished free from sin so that a clear reflection may be seen. Those who see God affirm him with negations: 'in glory uncontainable, in greatness incomprehensible, in loftiness inconceivable, in strength incomparable, in wisdom unteachable, in goodness inimitable, in beneficence inexpressible' (*Aut.* 1.3). His many names have an indirect application: light, logos, mind, spirit, wisdom, strength, power, providence, kingdom, judge, father and fire. The name 'God' refers to his steadfastness and his ability to set things in motion and keep them alive. 'Lord' indicates that he is the master of the universe and 'Father' that he is prior to the universe. He is called 'Creator' and 'Maker' because he creates and makes; 'Most high' because he is above all; 'Almighty' because he rules and surrounds the universe.

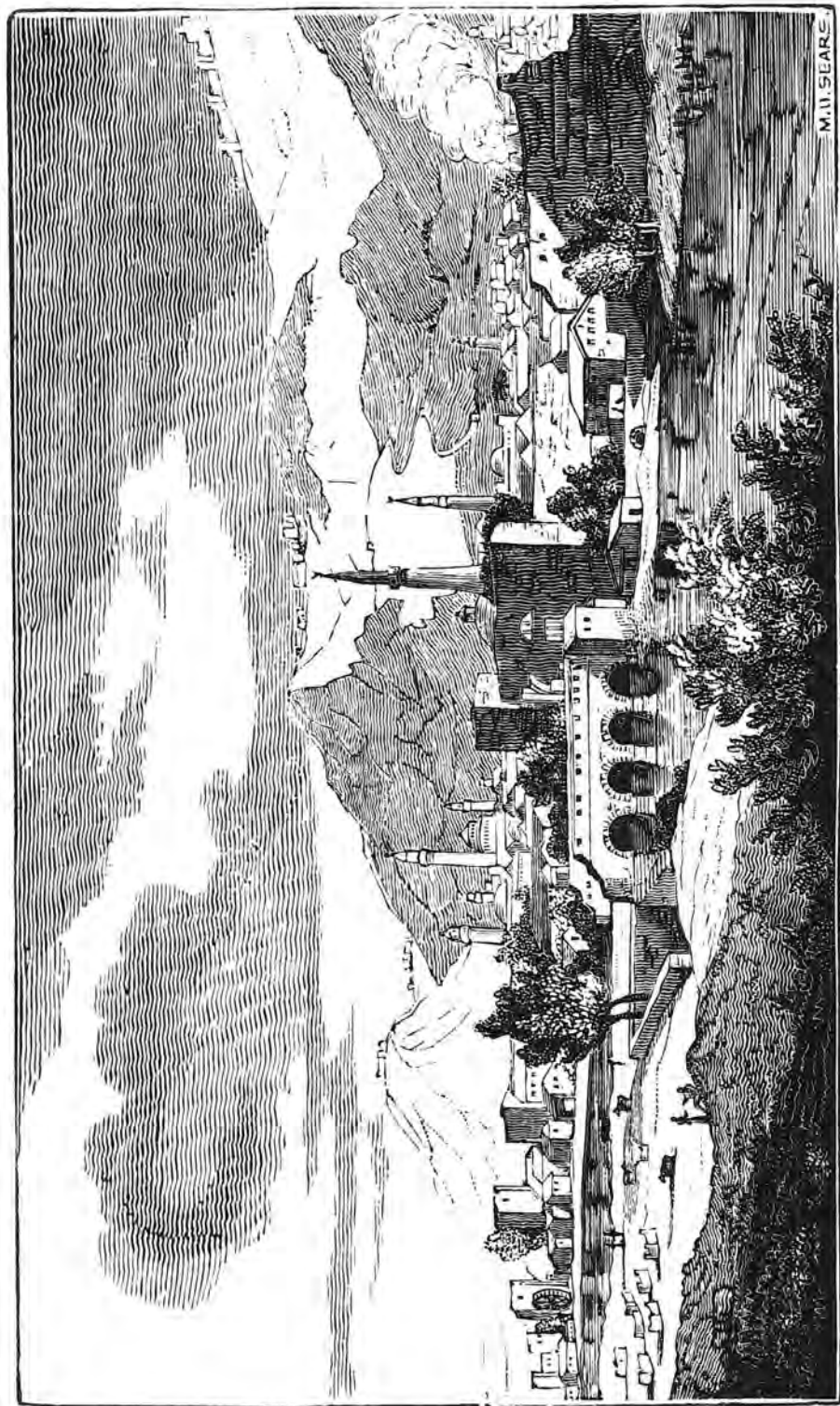


Figure 21.4 A nineteenth century lithograph of Antioch-on-the Orontes. From Lortet (1884: 199).

God made all things out of what did not exist. His existence is apprehended through his works, just as a pilot is recognized from the direction which a ship takes. His hand fits around the universe like the skin of a pomegranate around its cells, membranes and seeds (*Aut.* 1.5). The wealth, variety and beauty of creation are recognized in scripture. The believer looks back to his creation and forward to his resurrection, for the God who made is able to remake; creation is a pledge of recreation (*Aut.* 1.8). Signs of resurrection are all around us in the waxing and waning of the moon or in the healing of illness (*Aut.* 1.13).

In contrast, the gods of the pagans are merely the names of dead men, whose exploits were far from honourable (*Aut.* 1.10), and the emperor is to be honoured but never worshipped (*Aut.* 1.11). The God of the prophets is to be feared and believed; his predictions are fulfilled and his judgements are certain. Faith, which we have to exercise in so many parts of our life, is our response to God (*Aut.* 1.8; 14).

How did the world begin?

The second book recalls a friendly discussion with Autolycus and his request that Theophilus write something, however slender, to show the wisdom of Christian folly and the pointlessness of paganism. Truth is the stated aim of this book as of the first, when it sets out pagan and Christian stories of how the world began. The philosophers are of little use. Stoics deny the existence of God, or at least of a God who cares for the world. Platonists affirm a God who is father and maker of the universe, but go on to claim that matter is uncreated, which means that it is unchanging and equal to God. Anyone can make things out of pre-existing materials; to be God one has to create out of nothing.

There is plenty of talk about beginnings in Hesiod; but he does not explain who shaped the uncreated matter. Zeus and Kronos are late arrivals on the scene. There is a lot of nonsense about the gods coming into existence from earth and heaven and sea, when it has to be the other way around; the divine must come first. The myths and genealogies of the Greeks repel yet require our interest. 'All the writers of prose and poetry and so-called philosophers are deceived at every point, and those who give attention to them are just as bad' (*Aut.* 2.8). In contrast, God has his spokesmen, the Hebrew prophets and Greek Sibyl, who accurately predicted what was to come (*Aut.* 2.9). They began with a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* by a God who needed nothing beyond himself.

God's inner word or reason emerged to begin all things and to rule all that he had made through him. Theophilus finds the Stoic inner and uttered *logos* (*endiatbetos* and *prophorikos*) in the Psalms (*Aut.* 2.10). Even if a man had (*quelle horreur!*) 10,000 mouths and 10,000 tongues, he could not set out the ordered plan of the six days of creation (*Aut.* 2.12). God is the foundation not the roof of creation (*Aut.* 2.13). The world is like the sea, which would cease to be without the rivers which flow into it; unless the sweetness and compassion, righteousness and teaching of God's holy commandments flowed into the world, it would long ago have been destroyed by evil and sin within it. The churches are happy islands in this sea, havens of goodness and truth. Heresies are rocky and barren islands which destroy both ships and men (*Aut.* 2.14).

The three days which precede the lights of heaven are types of the divine triad: God, his word and his wisdom (*Aut.* 2.15). Theophilus makes an interesting story from the detail of creation. On the sixth day God made man in his own image and likeness. Everything else had been made by a word and was a *parergon*. Now his own hands were needed to perform the crowning act (*Aut.* 2.18) and his own breath gave living soul to the creature whom he placed in an Eastern garden (*Aut.* 2.19). Death came from human disobedience, not from the tree which brought knowledge to an infant Adam who could not wait for adulthood. Adam was capable of mortality or immortality, and even now can revert to life and immortality by obedience and faith (*Aut.* 2.27). Eve was made from Adam's side for several reasons. God could have made her separately, but he made the two together so that no one could suppose that one god made man and another woman. He wanted to prove the divine unity and also to increase man's love for woman by taking her from man's side. In marriage two become one flesh, joined by love such that husbands have often suffered death for the sake of their wives (*Aut.* 2.28).

After acknowledging the strategic importance of Satan, Theophilus proceeds with the history of mankind through Cain, Abel, Seth, Noah, to the tower of Babel, whence humans spread in every direction, even to the Britons in the arctic zones, and all increased in great number (*Aut.* 2.32). The prophets, Sibyl and poets tell of the greatness of God and the punishment of wicked men.

Are Christians concerned with truth?

The third and final book begins from a personal comment which claims that the recipient of the letter is, like others, caught up in the vanity of producing books. Autolycus has persisted in this pointless toil and still regards the Christian message as nonsense based on scriptures which are too modern to be true. Theophilus argues for the antiquity of Christian writings and the futility, inconsistency, immorality of Greek writers, philosophers and poets. From law and prophets come precepts of justice and chastity, while among Christians temperance, continence, monogamy, purity, righteousness and piety proliferate. He concludes on common ground: the love of learning. For Autolycus, who is possessed by this love, enough out of the vast store of truth has been said about the Christian way of life and the Christian God who created all things. If he reads this modest work, he will become a real lover of learning. Once again the love of truth takes common ground with its opposition and offers perfection of that common ground.

The remaining section covers questions of chronology in reply to the objection that the Christian story is a recent fiction (*Aut.* 3.16). Historians have gone wrong about the date of the deluge; the account of Moses is to be preferred. Therefore Theophilus begs the grace of the only God so that he may truly tell the whole truth and may lead others to divine grace and truth (*Aut.* 3.23). The linking of intellectual integrity with evangelical grace is more important than the detailed biblical chronology which follows. This chronology was necessary to show the antiquity of the prophetic writings, the divine nature of the Christian message and the certainty of its truth (*Aut.* 3.29). The whole work is offered to the careful reader as a pledge of truth (*Aut.* 3.30).

Theophilus has many points of contact with Greek-speaking Judaism but no identifiable citations from Philo. Yet he is closer to Philo than either Justin or Athenagoras; both his account of God (*Aut.* 3.9) and his prelude to the exegesis of Genesis 1 (*Aut.* 2.12) are similar to Philo (*De opificio* 170–2 and 4).

MELITO OF SARDIS

Melito, bishop of Sardis, is described by Polycrates of Ephesus in a letter to Pope Victor (189–99 CE) as a great luminary of Asia who will rise at the return of the lord (*H.E.* 5.24). It is claimed that he set the date of Easter on fourteenth Nisan, but there is no evidence of the apocalyptic views associated with that position. Among Melito's many works were an apology (*H.E.* 4.26) and the first list of the books of the Old Testament. He made a pilgrimage to Palestine (*H.E.* 4.26) to see where Christ lived and spoke. About 170 CE he addressed an apology to the emperor Marcus Aurelius. Only fragments survive, but in one of them he expressed, for the first time it would seem, the claim that Christianity brings blessing and welfare to the empire (*H. E.* 4.26.7–8).

We possess his remarkable Easter homily (*Peri Pascha, On Pascha*). Forgotten after the fourth century, discovered in fragments in the nineteenth century, it has been recovered and published in the twentieth century (Bonner 1940).¹³

Where does Jesus stand in human history? Why did he come so late?

Melito sets out the Paschal mystery which joins the old and the new, the mortal and the immortal, finding fulfilment in Christ who is all law, word, grace, witness, son, sheep, man and God. We move from the Old Testament as type to truth in Christ, to the reality which renders the old valueless. Christ is the passover of salvation, from slavery to freedom, from darkness to light, from death to life.

When Christ had come to Israel, had healed their sick and raised their dead, they treated him unjustly and killed him. Israel brought about the murder of the lord in Jerusalem. His death was overturned in the resurrection of Christus Victor. All is summed up in him, to whose 'I am' is added predicate after predicate; for he is Alpha and Omega, universal and eternal saviour. The recapitulation of all things in Christ is the centre of history and the heart of the Christian message.

The Old Testament gave necessary proof of antiquity to the Christian message, for what was true could not be new. It linked the plan of salvation to creation so that no dualism could separate the God of creation from the God of redemption. Finally, it provided imagery which was reborn in the Apocalypse and which gave content to the theme of fulfilment. The narrative belonged to Israel, and Christians needed to justify their appropriation of what all believed to be a true account of one God, one people and one land. (Modern scholarship has rendered this view acceptable only to conservative scholars, but to the early Christians it was as factual as the six days of creation.) Therefore the disinheritance of the Jews through their rejection of Christ was essential if Christians were to preserve the unity of their God and their history. Tragically, while Christians rejected the notion of 'one land' they did not reject

unambiguously the notion of one elect people before whom other nations were as dust. Melito's rhetoric was heightened by local strife with Jews. However, Justin makes similar claims to those of Melito; Jews and Christians were mutually convinced of each other's irrelevance to God. By their rejection of Jesus and his cross, the Jews had, at least for the present, written themselves out of the Christian history of salvation; on the other hand, this Christian history was, for the Jews, a plain aberration from the truth.

MINUCIUS FELIX

Minucius Felix, a leading advocate in Rome (Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 5.1.21), was commended by Jerome for knowledge and literary excellence (Epistle 70.5). Early in the third century, he wrote a dialogue in Latin entitled *Octavius* which was rediscovered in 1560.¹⁴ The work has African overtones but belongs in Rome, where it aimed to present Christianity outside the foreign groups in the church. It takes the form of a dialogue between two Christians (Minucius Felix and Octavius) and a gentile (Caecilius) on a walk from Rome to Ostia, where most of the discussion occurs. Minucius took Cicero (*De natura deorum*) as his model, adding details at every point for the modern collector of classical parallels. The protagonists in the *controversia* argue for and against a thesis. The dialogue follows the apologetic principle that opponents should be won over through their own ideas (cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 5.3.18). Because of similar claims concerning the one God, it was easy to believe 'either that present-day Christians are philosophers or that past philosophers were already Christians' (Oct. 20).

Is it not foolish, in a world of chance to abandon ancient gods and ancient wisdom?

The debate is triggered by the veneration which the pagan protagonist offers to a statue of Serapis. The case against Christian belief begins from human uncertainty. Everything is a conglomeration of atoms which gather and scatter; there is no place for a creator or a judge. Human injustice, the prosperity of the wicked and natural catastrophes rule out divine providence; nature and chance govern all (Oct. 5). New religious choices are mistaken; only ancestral faith is secure because it comes from blessed antiquity. Rome owes her greatness to her gods and she has always respected the gods of conquered peoples (Oct. 6). All who serve the Roman gods in sacrifice and augury have been proved right (Oct. 8), and it is outrageous that atheists should dishonour these gods. Christian ignorance is confirmed by disgusting practices (Oct. 8). Wicked weeds grow apace as does this mixture of secrecy, lust, incest, superstition, veneration of priestly genitals, worship of a criminal cross, eating of infants, sexual orgies (Oct. 9). Worship without altars, temples, images, must hide shame, for even the wretched Jews had public temples and altars. The solitary Christian god cannot protect his people yet remains an invisible, omnipresent trouble-maker (Oct. 10). When the one sure thing is nature's eternal order, Christians predict its collapse and their own beatitude in bodies long since decomposed

(*Oct.* 11). Miserable, antisocial Christians accept present torments, and live in dread of pagan gods (*Oct.* 12). How much wiser is the scepticism of Socratic ignorance! When Simonides was asked about the gods, he asked for a day's adjournment, and kept coming back for further adjournments on the ground that the question grew more difficult as each day went by. Only arrogant and irresponsible people come to a firm conclusion on this question (*Oct.* 13). In this powerful case for the prosecution, philosophical weaknesses bear equal weight with moral slanders.

Can Christians show where they are right and pagans are wrong?

The Christian reply begins from the innate rationality of all humans, not just a privileged few (*Oct.* 16). The obligation of self-knowledge requires an understanding of the universe which, by its order and beauty, points to the sovereign reason of its maker (*Oct.* 17). The wonder of human birth and of the peculiar British, Egyptian and Mesopotamian climates reveals the hand of the father of all. A divided kingdom never lasts and the constellations of heaven would collide if they were governed by a committee. Beyond our infirmity, God's infinity shines in splendour and his name is on the lips of all (*Oct.* 18). Poets and philosophers join in affirming the unicity, majesty and transcendence of God. The fables of uncritical ancestors were often built around the memory of a revered leader (*Oct.* 20); Euhemerus lists those humans who, because of their virtue, have been deified (*Oct.* 21). Myths of the gods of Greece and Rome are riddled with contradictions and absurdities (*Oct.* 22f.). When does a god cease to be a stone and become worthy of worship (*Oct.* 24)? The might of Rome owes more to brutality and impiety than to piety. Auguries and prophecies are often wrong; when they are right they are the work of demons (*Oct.* 26) whose evil influence persecutes Christians (*Oct.* 27) and defends malefactors (*Oct.* 28). There is no indecency among Christians and their sign of the cross permeates both the order of nature and pagan religion (*Oct.* 29). If anyone could believe that Christians kill babies and drain their blood, he must himself be capable of such an unnatural act (Tertullian makes the same point: *Apologeticum* 8.5). Pagans kill their babies in various ways (like abortion) following the cruel examples of their divine Saturn and of widespread human sacrifice; Christians alone abhor manslaughter in the arena and theatre and will not even eat the blood of animals (*Oct.* 30). Similarly incest is found among pagans but never among Christians, whose charity, innocence and sobriety attract new followers (*Oct.* 31). The unseen, all-knowing God is worshipped with mind, heart and conscience but never with physical gifts which are already his. Private innocence and public rescue of those in need declare homage to God. It is easy to believe in a God whom we cannot see, whose power is everywhere visible and who, like the sun, gives sight but remains too dazzling to behold; the rays of his presence penetrate into every corner of the universe. For humans, his omnipresence is deep within. He is present in the darkness, in the 'second darkness' of our thought, to share our life (*Oct.* 32). This Stoic (Seneca, *Ep.* 41.1; 120.14; Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.8.11f.) and biblical theme makes an incarnation intelligible, and is the starting point of apologetic (Acts 17:28). As he is within us so we are within him. It is true that the Jews worshipped this same God but their present distress proves their infidelity: they deserted God before he deserted them (*Oct.* 33). Christian

eschatology differs little from that of the philosophers who took their ideas from the prophets. All agree that everything which has a beginning must have an end. Resurrection is no problem to a creator-God, and the whole of nature tells its story: sunrise follows sunset, falling leaves return in Spring. Final judgement fits with human freedom and a patient just God (*Oct.* 34) who governs all. If Christians are poor, they travel light and are all the happier; if they suffer, they gain from the refining fire of tribulation (*Oct.* 37). The supreme victory belongs to the Christian martyr, who freely chooses to obey God rather than men. Neither forsaken by God nor destroyed by death, his triumph gains the prize of victory. Christian courage includes women and children and far outstrips pagan heroes. Happiness, power, wealth, high office, noble birth mean nothing; only virtue and the knowledge of God have lasting value (*Oct.* 37). Pagan customs are demonic, while Christians live in tranquil moderation, trusting in the goodness of their God (*Oct.* 38).

Octavius wins the debate for the Christian God and the integrity of Christian virtue. However predictable this seems, the strength of the dialogue lies in two points. The first rule of controversy – that the opposition case should be presented as strongly as possible – has been followed. Second, the presence of God who shares human life in its inner darkness makes an incarnation the most reasonable thing on earth.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The writings of the apologists show loyalty to Christian tradition and awareness of the minds of those whom they address. They build their case around the goodness of the creator, the universality of reason and law, the perfection of all things in Christ and the unending claims of love. On all these points Justin is joined by other apologists. The unique quality of the Christian God is his transcendent goodness, and therefore the distinct imperative of Christian ethics is the love of enemies (*Matt.* 5:43–8). The love of truth commits Christians to honest argument, wherever it may lead. The perfection of Christ rounds off a divine dispensation which orders all history under the will of one saving God. Despite loose ends, the logic of Christian theology as it emerged in Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian may be discerned in the apologists: one God is the first-principle of goodness, truth and being, because he has completed his plan of salvation in Christ.

NOTES

- 1 For general works on the Apologists, see Puech (1912), Casamassa (1944) and Pellegrino (1947).
- 2 For the context in which the Apologists lived and wrote, both Christian and non-Christian, see Grant (1986), Osborn (1993), Runia (1993) and Lieu (1996).
- 3 For texts and translations of Justin, see Munier (1994), Barnard (1997), Wartelle (1987), Williams (1930), Hardy (1953), Archambault (1909) and Blunt (1911).
- 4 Monographs on Justin include Goodenough (1923), Prigent (1964), Barnard (1967), van Winden (1971), Osborn (1973), Skarsaune (1987) and Munier (1994).

- 5 See the secondary literature referred to in Osborn (1973), Skarsaune (1987) and Munier (1994).
- 6 The etching is taken from *Vedute di Roma Disegnate ed Incise da Giambattista Piranesi, Architetto Veneziano*, died 1778.
- 7 For text and translations of Tatian's writings, see Goodspeed (1914) and Pratten (1867).
- 8 For a thorough and recent treatment of the *Diatessaron*, see Petersen (1994).
- 9 For recent work on Tatian, see Petersen (1994) and Elze (1960).
- 10 For texts and translations of Athenagoras, see Schoedel (1972) and Crehan (1956).
- 11 For monographs on Athenagoras see Bardy (1948), Barnard (1972) and especially Pouderon (1989).
- 12 For the text and translations, see Bardy (1948) and Grant (1970).
- 13 For the text and translations, also see Testuz (1960) and Hall (1979).
- 14 The work is translated in Clarke (1974).

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THE EARLY THEOLOGIAN



Gerald Bray

THE BEGINNINGS OF SYSTEMATIC CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

About the year 180 there was a noticeable change in the level and content of Christian writing. What had been largely occasional and apologetic in nature now became much more systematic and ambitious, reflecting the enormous strides which the Christian church had made and the growing need for its leaders to present a reasoned account of their faith which could stand alongside the great works of pagan antiquity. During the course of the third century, Christian writers outstripped their pagan counterparts to become the most profound and prolific force in both the Greek and the Latin literary worlds. This happened, it should be noted, before Christianity became a legal religion (with the Edict of Milan in 313 CE), by which time its intellectual underpinnings were as solid as those of any of its rivals.

The achievement of these years belongs to a group of theologians who mostly worked independently of one another, but who together created a corpus of writings which have been regarded ever since as classics (Osborn 1993). During this period moreover, there was a clear and conscious divide between 'orthodox' writings, on the one hand, and heretical ones on the other. There is considerable debate (Bauer 1964; Turner 1954; Osborn 1993) about the appropriateness of using this terminology to describe writings before c. 180, but after that time there can be no doubt. However poorly it may have been defined, there was an orthodox consciousness in the church which united its principal apologists and set them apart from others who were being clearly branded as dissidents. This consciousness survived any number of schisms, and even the posthumous condemnations which affected some of the leading theologians of this period.

Another important factor which must be taken into account is the rise of a Latin-speaking Christianity which was increasingly independent of its Greek predecessor. Broadly speaking, the two language areas developed distinctive traditions with very little interaction between them during this period. This would have important consequences at a later date, when it became necessary to resolve doctrinal controversies at the level of ecumenical councils. However, at the time they were writing,

all the theologians discussed here believed that they were expressing the mind of the universal church and were unaware of any major differences between them.

For the sake of clarity, this chapter is subdivided into Greek and Latin sections, and each major theologian is treated separately within the appropriate section.

GREEK WRITERS

Irenaeus

His life

Irenaeus was born in Smyrna, one of the seven churches of Asia mentioned in the book of Revelation (2:8–11), sometime about 140. Little is known about his life (Minns 1994: 1–2). As a young man he heard the aged bishop Polycarp preach (*Adversus Haereses* 3.3.4; Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.20.6), and through him had direct contact with the apostolic age. At some point, Irenaeus left Asia Minor for Gaul, where he settled in the city of Lugdunum (Lyons). In 177 he went on a mission to Rome to deal with some questions raised by the Montanist heresy, but when he returned to Lyons he found a church decimated by persecution. He was immediately elected its bishop and remained there for the rest of his life. It is not known how or when he died, though a late tradition claims that he was martyred. Irenaeus wrote in Greek, which was his native tongue, even though he ministered in a Latin-speaking province of the Roman empire. Denis Minns has recently provided a useful guide to the huge bibliography on Irenaeus (1994: xiv–xvi).

His works

Of his many writings (see Roberts and Rambaut 1868–9), most survive only in fragments. Only two of his treatises have been preserved intact, one in a Latin translation and the other in Armenian. The first of these is the *Detection and Overthrow of the So-called Gnosis*, more usually known as *Adversus Haereses* or *Against all Heresies*, and it is on this work that Irenaeus' reputation as a theologian rests. There are several editions available (Massuet 1710; Harvey 1857; Dods 1885; Roberts and Rambaut 1868–9). As the original title indicates, it is divided into two parts. The first consists of a single book, which gives a history of Gnosticism and details the beliefs of particular gnostic thinkers. It is an invaluable source for our knowledge of Gnosticism, though it must now be supplemented and corrected by the gnostic texts discovered at Nag Hammadi (Egypt) in 1946 (see Olson 1992). The second part is divided into four books, each of which is a refutation of Gnosticism. The first of these books combats gnostic ideas from the standpoint of reason, the second from the standpoint of the church's doctrine, and the third from the sayings of Jesus. The last book is a treatise on the resurrection of the flesh, which all the gnostics denied.

The work is not well structured, and this has led to a number of theories about its composition (see Benoit 1960; Bacq 1978). Some scholars (see Minns 1994) have maintained that Irenaeus threw it together haphazardly over many years, but it

seems more likely that he had a planned structure from the beginning, which he supplemented at different times. The various incongruities and repetitions can therefore be regarded as later insertions which were never properly edited. Irenaeus is known to have depended on earlier sources, but as these have almost all been lost it is impossible to say to what extent.

His second surviving work is the *Demonstration of Apostolic Teaching* which was unknown until an Armenian version turned up in 1904. English translations are available (Robinson 1920; Smith 1952). It is subdivided into two main parts, the first of which tells the sacred history of mankind from Adam to Christ and the second of which tries to prove the truth of the Christian revelation on the basis of Old Testament prophecies. The first part is prefaced with a short discourse on the Trinity, one of the earliest in Christian literature.

His theology

Irenaeus' theology was fully Trinitarian, and he believed that all three divine persons could be found at work in the Old Testament as well as in the New. He was particularly concerned to identify the Creator God with the Father of Jesus Christ, in direct refutation of most gnostic theories. As for the Son, he believed in his eternal generation from the Father, but castigated any attempt to explain this great mystery. He was strongly interested in the incarnation of the Son, the extent to which he shared our humanity (Wingren 1959; Lassiat 1974).

Irenaeus believed that God's revelation was fully contained in the New Testament, though he did not use that word to describe the apostolic writings (Lawson 1948). His canon seems to have contained the *Shepherd of Hermas*, but not the Epistle to the Hebrews. According to Irenaeus (*Adversus Haereses* 3.3.1), the right interpretation of the Bible had been confided to the churches which had been founded by the apostles, and it was to them that the seeker after truth should turn. This helps to explain his particular reverence for the church of Rome, because it was the final home of both Peter and Paul. Irenaeus believed that the apostles had entrusted what he called 'the canon of truth' to these churches (*Adv. Haer.* 1.3.4). This may have been a kind of credal formula, which is certainly what the expression came to signify at a later date, or it may have been simply the general gist of apostolic teaching, which is preserved for us in the New Testament as a whole.

Irenaeus had a tripartite view of the human being, which was divided into body, soul and spirit. He further believed that the soul was the image of God, which at the fall of Adam had lost its likeness to the divine being. Salvation therefore was the restoration of the lost likeness to the image, which took place by an extensive programme of 'recapitulation' (Fantino 1986). According to this idea, Christ was the second Adam, whose main purpose was to recapitulate human history, avoiding the errors of the first Adam and his offspring (see Nielsen 1968). In this scheme of things, Mary the mother of Jesus became the second Eve, an identification which came originally from Justin Martyr, but which Irenaeus incorporated into a complete doctrine of salvation. Irenaeus believed that history was heading towards a final cataclysm, predicted in the book of Revelation. He was what would today be

described as a 'millenarian', although his version of this relied more on recapitulation than on any dispensational theories.

In spite of the loss of most of his output and the disorganized nature of what remains, Irenaeus can claim to have been the first systematic Christian theologian. He had a clear sense of what was wrong with Gnosticism and was able to articulate a coherent picture of the Christian theology which was needed to combat it.

Hippolytus

His life

Although he was almost certainly of Eastern, and possibly of Alexandrian, origin, Hippolytus spent most of his active years at Rome, where he was the last major figure to use Greek as his chief means of expression. He was already prominent in that city in 212, when Origen heard him preach there, and in 217 he set himself up as the head of the Roman church in defiance of Pope Callistus I, whom he regarded as too lenient in his treatment of penitents. The schism continued until 235, when both Hippolytus and Pontian, Callistus' successor but one, were arrested and deported to Sardinia. It is thought that the two men became reconciled at this time, and that both died in captivity shortly afterwards. They were buried together at Rome in 236 or 237, and a statue was erected to Hippolytus about the same time. This statue, or something claimed to be it (see Brent 1995), was recovered in 1551 and installed in the Vatican Library in 1959 (see Figure 22.1). The statue, recently the subject of a major monograph by Brent (1995), is important because on its base are listed all the works attributed to Hippolytus, as well as his attempt to calculate the date of Easter by a method independent of the Jewish calendar. The list has helped scholars to identify works preserved under other names, and also gives us a clear idea of how much we have lost.

His works and theology

Little of Hippolytus' work has been preserved in the original Greek (Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vols 10 and 16), but there are numerous translations into Latin and a number of oriental languages which have survived (Quasten 1950: II, 163–98). English translations are available (MacMahon 1986). Together with the surviving Greek fragments, these give us a fairly complete picture of his works and beliefs. It must be said that the details of his career have been called into question by scholars who doubt the story that he was an anti-pope, but the majority opinion still accepts the broad outline of the traditional account as given above.

Hippolytus was a disciple of Irenaeus, and in many ways he represents a middle stage between the bishop of Lyons and Origen. However, it must also be said that he lacks the theological depth of those giants. His most important theological work is the so-called *Refutation of all Heresies* (*Philosophoumena*) of which eight books are preserved. The first has been known since 1701 under the name of Origen, and is a poor summary of the history of Greek philosophy. It was evidently designed as a preliminary to the refutation of the gnostic heresies derived from it. The next two



Figure 22.1 The statue of Hippolytus at the foot of the steps leading into the Vatican Library. Photo Philip F. Esler.

books are lost, but the following seven were discovered in 1842 and published nine years later. The whole work was identified as belonging to Hippolytus by L. Duncker and F. G. Schneidewin in 1859. Book four is a treatise on astrology and magic, while the tenth book is a summary of Jewish history and true biblical doctrine. The most interesting and important books are five to nine, which contain a detailed refutation of 33 different gnostic sects. These books remain one of the most important sources for our knowledge of Gnosticism, and they show a profundity and originality which are lacking in the other books.

Similar to this was another work, the *Syntagma* (*Against all Heresies*), which is now lost but which can be recovered from fragments as well as from the extensive portions of it which were copied more or less directly into other works, including Tertullian's *On the Prescription of Heretics* and Epiphanius' *Panarion*, or 'remedy' against heresies (Dix 1937). It covered 32 different heresies, all of which are listed at the end of Tertullian's work. Hippolytus believed that heretics were atheists who derived their ideas from Greek philosophy rather than from the scriptures. It was a simplistic view but one which was widely held by contemporaries and which influenced the thinking of more sophisticated theologians like Tertullian.

Hippolytus also wrote a book called *The Antichrist*, in which he endeavoured to prove that Rome was not to be identified with this figure, who was still to come. He made considerable use of the book of Daniel, on which he also wrote a commentary,

which is the oldest work of biblical exegesis to survive in its entirety. Hippolytus was also the author of an allegorical commentary on the Song of Songs, which is remarkably similar to that of Origen (see p. 561), though there is no known connection between the two. The ideas contained in it became stock themes of later allegorical commentaries on the book, though it is uncertain whether these were derived from him or from Origen.

Hippolytus also wrote chronological works, of which the most important is his *Chronicle* which he completed shortly before his death. It is a history of the world based mainly on biblical sources, and represents an important attempt to reinterpret human history from a Christian point of view. He also tried to devise a method for calculating the date of Easter, and wrote a treatise on the subject, but it was not successful and had to be abandoned when the calculation failed as early as 237.

Several homilies are known by title, and there are a number of fragments which have been preserved in different places, but there is little more that we can say about them. His major work, from the modern point of view, is the *Apostolic Tradition*, which is a compendium of liturgical practices purporting to be a record of the most traditional rites of the church. It has been known for many centuries, but was not identified as belonging to Hippolytus until 1916. It survives in a Latin translation, as well as in numerous oriental versions. It appears that the book was quickly forgotten at Rome but preserved in the East, where it became the model for liturgical practice. It is divided into three parts, the first of which deals with the ordination of bishops, priests and deacons, as well as a number of minor ministers.

The second part contains rules for the laity, including rites of baptism, confirmation and first communion. The first of these is of special interest because it contains the full text of the old Roman creed and the pattern of question and answers which characterized early baptismal ceremonies. The last part covers the weekly Eucharistic service, the rules for morning prayer, the burial service and a form of catechesis. All of these have become well known to modern churchgoers because they have formed the basis of the liturgical revisions which have swept through the major Christian denominations in the second half of the twentieth century. As a result of this, there is a vast literature on this work (Quasten 1950 2:181–5), which is now more influential in the life of the church than any other text from antiquity apart from the Bible itself.

There is not much to be said about Hippolytus' theology except that it is closely modelled on that of Irenaeus. In particular, he follows the same recapitulationist scheme. However, he is less successful in his attempts to defend Trinitarianism against the monarchianism of his time. This came in two forms. According to the first one, only the Father was God; the Son and the Holy Spirit were merely his agents, although they shared something of his divine quality. According to the second form, which is often linked to an otherwise unknown heretic called Sabellius, the names Father, Son and Holy Spirit were interchangeable. They were all just different titles of the one God, reflecting his roles as creator, redeemer and sanctifier. In reaction to Sabellianism, Hippolytus falls into something like the first form of monarchianism. He even goes to the point of claiming that the Logos emerged from the Father in three separate stages, of which the incarnation of Christ was the final and most complete one. His ecclesiology is hierarchical, again following Irenaeus

and anticipating Origen, but he was a perfectionist with no room for 'sinners' in the church. This point of view is clearly unrealistic, but it is characteristic of many of Hippolytus' contemporaries, and cannot be regarded as an aberration on his part.

On the whole, it can be said that Hippolytus was a rather simplistic thinker, who was nevertheless able to categorize the thoughts of others and provide a reasonable schematic account of the different heresies which were current in his day. That made him a useful source for subsequent authors to draw on, and much of what they write concerning this early period must be regarded as deriving more or less entirely from Hippolytus' accounts.

Clement of Alexandria

Clement (Titus Flavius Clemens Alexandrinus) was probably born in Athens about 150. It is not known when he became a Christian, but at some point he came under the influence of the Sicilian philosopher Pantaenus, who was a Christian and had become a teacher and head of the catechetical school at Alexandria. Pantaenus died shortly before 200 and Clement succeeded to his position as head of the catechetical school, but in 203 he was forced to flee to Cappadocia because of an outbreak of persecution. There he remained until his death in about 214.

Clement's theological reputation rests on his three surviving books (see Osborn 1957, 1993). The texts are set out in Migne (*Patrologia Graeca*, Vols 8–9) and there are English translations (for example, Coxe *et al*; 1885). The first of these is the *Protrepticus* ('exhortation'), which is an evangelistic tract. Clement was severely critical of paganism, especially its reliance on mythology. He was also strongly opposed to the mystery religions, which he regarded as a nonsensical mish-mash of material and spiritual elements. His second book, the *Paedagogus* ('tutor') is a sequel to the first. In it, he addresses the man who has been delivered from the foolishness of paganism and tries to instruct him in the way of Christ. He does this by calling Christ the true Logos, borrowing a philosophical term and developing it in the light of John's Gospel, which had also used the same theme. In the first part of the *Paedagogus* Clement concentrates on the idea of love, but in the second part he becomes more practical and gives his reader what amounts to ethical guidance for everyday life. This part of the book is particularly interesting for us, because it gives us one of the best pictures we have of daily life in Alexandria during the Roman period.

The third book is called the *Stromata* ('carpets') because it is a collage of disconnected chapters knit together rather like a carpet. This was a standard genre in Late antiquity and was frequently employed by writers who wanted to concentrate on special themes without bothering to construct an overarching philosophical framework to hold them all together. In this book Clement defends philosophy as the true gnosis, and claims that it was given to the Greeks as their version of the Old Testament (Van den Hoek 1988). However, he also says that knowledge of God can only come by faith, not by reason, and that Plato copied all his best ideas from Moses.

Clement also wrote a kind of commentary on scripture, but it seems that this was more like an explanation of isolated verses than a systematic treatment of the whole.

The work is now lost, but we know something about it from the criticisms made of it by Photius (ninth century). According to Photius, it was highly allegorical in tone, and contained a number of fanciful interpretations of the Bible, some of which were frankly heretical. It is possible that Clement got some of these ideas from Philo of Alexandria, but this cannot be proved.

Clement's theology was deeply rooted in philosophy, and he was a firm advocate of the basic harmony between faith and knowledge. To his mind, the Logos was the highest principle in the universe, the creator of the world, and the teacher and lawgiver of mankind. The Logos became incarnate in Christ, but in other ways he had already revealed himself both to the Jews and to the Greeks. His philosophical approach gave him a strong predisposition towards affirming the ultimate unity of all things, and this must have contributed to his aversion to any form of heresy or schism in the church.

Clement believed in the fall of Adam, but not in inherited guilt, and his view of this question has been standard in the Eastern Orthodox churches ever since. He accepted the notion that baptism was a spiritual regeneration of the believer, and rejected any notion of sacrifice in connection with holy communion, which to him was likewise a purely spiritual rite. Somewhat surprisingly, he spoke out in defence of matrimony, and even regarded it as superior to celibacy, a view which was very rare in ancient times.

Clement's works may be summed up by saying that they reveal a deep and mature knowledge of the Bible, as well as a good command of Greek philosophy. He regarded it as his mission to convert pagan intellectuals to Christianity, and he was the first Christian who took the need to reconcile faith and knowledge seriously. In that respect his writings have a curiously modern relevance, though their Platonic context (Lilla 1971) creates a barrier which somewhat reduces their appeal today.

Origen

His life

A reasonable amount of information survives concerning the life of Origen (Crouzel 1989). He is profiled in Chapter 39 of this volume, and fuller details and bibliography are found there. He was born into a Christian family at Alexandria about 185, and was given the best education which his father could afford. He became a pupil in the catechetical school at Alexandria, where he succeeded to the headship in 203, when Clement fled to Cappadocia. He was only about eighteen years old at the time, but already his great intellectual gifts were being recognized. It seems that it was about this time also that he castrated himself, in the mistaken belief that this had been approved by Jesus, who had spoken of those who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Origen travelled widely in his early years at the school, going to Rome in 212 and to Palestine in 216. Later he visited Greece as well, probably in order to deal with heretical tendencies in the churches there. Unfortunately he had fallen out with bishop Demetrius of Alexandria, who seems to have been jealous of his pupil's growing fame and brilliance. Demetrius complained that Origen, who was still a

layman, should not have been permitted to give lectures to bishops, as he had apparently been doing at Caesarea Philippi on his visit in 216. To avoid any repetition of this problem, the bishops of Jerusalem and Caesarea ordained him when he was on his way to Greece (in 228), but then Demetrius objected on the ground that a man who had castrated himself was unfit for the ministry! On his return to Alexandria from Greece, Origen was tried by the bishop and his synod, and in 231 he was excommunicated. Demetrius died not long afterwards, and Origen might have stayed in Alexandria, but when the excommunication was confirmed by the new bishop, he gave up the struggle and emigrated to Palestine. There he was welcomed and encouraged to open another theological school, where he taught for nearly twenty years. He suffered in the persecution under Decius in 251, and it seems that he died, possibly of wounds suffered at that time, at some point between then and 254.

Origen's writings

Origen is credited with something like 800 works, almost all of which have been lost. Of the remainder, only a minority have been preserved in the original Greek, and most are available only in Latin translations, some of which are known to be fairly free in their renderings (the texts are in Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* Vols 11–17; see Crombie 1885 for an English translation). To give some idea of the scale of this loss we may take Origen's homilies, of which there were originally 574. Of these 388 are now totally lost, 166 survive in Latin, and only 20 have come down to us in the original Greek. But although so much has been lost and much of what remains has been abridged, paraphrased and translated, the evidence of the originals, when we have them, suggests that our general picture of Origen's beliefs has not been seriously distorted as a result.

Origen wanted to be remembered above all as a biblical scholar (Trigg 1883), and his great masterpiece was the so-called *Hexapla*, or Old Testament in six parallel columns. The first of these contained the Hebrew text in its original alphabet. The second was the same text turned into Greek letters, because otherwise it would have been impossible for most people to pronounce. The Hebrew vowel points were not added until some centuries later, so this was an important service for those who wished to learn the language. The last four columns contained four different Greek translations of the original. The first of these was done by Aquila (c. 130 CE), the second by Symmachus (c. 180–200 CE), the third was the Septuagint translation (LXX; c. 200 BCE) and the fourth was done by a Jew named Theodotion (c. 150–200 BCE).

The compilation of this great work fully justifies Origen's claim to be the founder of the textual criticism of the Bible. Not only did he take the trouble to familiarize himself with Hebrew, which was a very rare accomplishment among the early Christians, but he was also prepared to compare different Greek translations of it, when both the synagogue and the church had more or less accepted the LXX as the preferred version. The *Hexapla* was prepared at Caesarea and remained there for several centuries. Jerome was able to consult it, and testified to its great value. It was so vast that nobody seems to have copied it in full, but extracts were made, and some

of these have survived in fragments. Their main value today is to show that the other Greek translations are sometimes superior to the LXX in their rendering of the Hebrew.

In addition to his textual criticism, Origen wrote an enormous number of tracts on the Bible, which can be divided into the so-called *scholia*, which are short exegetical notes, the homilies and the commentaries. The first of these survive only in fragments. The homilies are interesting, but they are of value mainly for our understanding of Origen's spiritual outlook, with its profound mystical streak, and tell us little about the text of Scripture itself. It is therefore mainly in the commentaries that we encounter Origen as a biblical interpreter. It seems that these originally covered the entire Bible, but only fragments of them remain, apart from the works on Matthew, John, Romans and the Song of Songs. To these may be added the fragments of 1 Corinthians, which are extensive enough to give us some idea of Origen's treatment of the book as a whole.

Of the commentaries, the one on John is the earliest and most extensive, though parts of it have been lost. Origen spends the first book expounding 'In the beginning was the Word' (John 1:1) and in the course of this exposition he manages to deal with most of the themes of the Gospel as a whole. He believed that John was the greatest of the gospels because of its theological tone, and this is reflected in his exegesis. The commentary on Matthew is only partially preserved, and his remarks on the first 12 chapters are missing. The approach is less thematic than in the commentary on John, but his tendency to allegorize makes up for this to some extent and produces similar results.

More important than either of these are his commentaries on Romans and on the Song of Songs. The first survives only in a Latin abridgement composed by Rufinus around the year 400. There were originally 15 books, but Rufinus cut these down to ten because he felt that the original was unnecessarily prolix. He must have been right, because even after his editorial work, the commentary seems to us to be extraordinarily verbose and diffuse. Much of it is really a kind of biblical encyclopaedia, ranging through the Old Testament in an attempt to explain Judaism to contemporary gentiles. However, the core treatment of Romans is fundamentally sound and is much more literal than one might expect. It is also marked by a deep pastoral sense, which gives us some insight into Origen's greatness as a Christian leader, as well as a scholar.

It is very different with the commentary on the Song of Songs, which is totally allegorical. Origen regarded the bridegroom as Christ, but he was less consistent with the bride, who is sometimes thought of as the church and sometimes as the soul of the individual believer. This commentary can fairly be said to have set the tone for the next 15 centuries and more, and the ambiguity in his treatment of the bride became typical of the allegorical tradition as a whole.

To the modern mind, Origen's most important work is probably his *Against Celsus* (Chadwick 1953), which is a refutation of the pagan philosopher Celsus' work, the *True Discourse*, discussed in detail in Chapter 32 of this volume (also see Andresen 1955). In this work Celsus attacked Christianity and tried to shame Christians out of their faith. Celsus was a Platonist who wrote about 175, and the most remarkable thing about him is that he was so well-informed about Christianity. He knew the

scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments well enough to be able to pinpoint apparent discrepancies in them, and he was thoroughly familiar with the differences between the mainline church and the various gnostic sects. However, it has recently been shown (by Andresen 1955) that in attacking Christianity, Celsus was also giving into it. He basically accepted the Christian contention that people need to be saved, and he tried to prove that philosophy could do this as well, if not better than Christianity. In this respect he was the forerunner of Plotinus and the neo-Platonist philosophers of the third century, who would turn Platonism into a mystical belief which was almost a religion.

Celsus was ahead of his time, and for many decades his work was ignored. Pagans were not yet interested in Christianity and Christians moved in different circles. But by about 240 the two worlds were meeting with increasing frequency, and Origen was persuaded to tackle this great adversary of the faith head on. He did so by quoting extensively from Celsus' work (which is how we now know what Celsus actually said), and by refuting him point by point. The result was a Christian philosophical apologetic which was to be the forerunner of all subsequent efforts of that kind. Without accepting Platonism, Origen borrowed the structure of logic on which it was based and used it to argue for the truth of Christianity. He demonstrated that Christians could use philosophical methods in defence of their cause, without coming to conclusions which were incompatible with the teaching of scripture.

Origen's work extends to eight books, all of which survive in the original Greek. Origen begins by saying that when Jesus was attacked he remained silent, and regrets that he is unable to follow this wise example, because he has been asked specifically to deal with Celsus' misrepresentations. Celsus apparently attacked the church on the grounds that it was a secret society, and Origen has little difficulty refuting that. He also claimed that there was no real difference between Judaism and Christianity, since both were barbarous in origin, and again, Origen has no problem in showing that that was a gross misunderstanding. Celsus then adopted the persona of a Jew, and argued that the Christians had abandoned their ancestral religion. This was a powerful argument in ancient times, but Origen is able to show that the Christian revelation was inherent in Judaism, and represents its fulfilment not its abandonment. Much of the refutation is therefore concerned with the fulfilment of various Old Testament prophecies in Christ, and this is the heart of Origen's argument. The remainder consists of objections raised by Celsus to the possibility of a divine incarnation, about the uncouth style of the New Testament, and so on. Origen has little difficulty answering these points, and his work has remained a classic of apologetical literature ever since.

Closely related to his rebuttal of Celsus is Origen's great dogmatic work, *On First Principles*, which survives in a number of Greek fragments as well as in a free Latin translation (Smith 1992). This book can fairly claim to be the first manual of systematic theology to have been written by a Christian. In four books it covers theology in the strict sense (i.e. the doctrine of God), cosmology, anthropology and teleology. He begins from the principle that it is the task of the theologian to clarify the obscure passages of scripture, and to harmonize them into a consistent whole. Many of his conclusions rely on an allegorical interpretation of the Bible, which

most modern readers find unacceptable, but it is still possible to appreciate his intention and his method to some extent.

'Theology' for Origen covered the being and nature of God, and extended to the entire supernatural realm. It is in that book that he discusses the being of angels, and even the nature of the resurrection body and the last judgement. In the second book he talks about the creation of the material world, a controversial subject in his day because of the Platonist belief that matter was evil. In this book he refutes the gnostic idea that the creator was an inferior god, and not the Father of Jesus Christ, and he gives an extensive explanation of the incarnation, including a discourse on the human soul. He returns to the theme of the Holy Spirit, which he already discussed in the first book, and gives a more detailed account of the resurrection and last judgement as well. The third book is more like a running commentary on biblical history, followed by discourses on philosophy, temptation and time. The final book is an extensive treatment of the inspiration of Scripture, and also contains Origen's observations on the Trinity. For the last two books, we have Greek fragments which are long enough to be useful supplements to Rufinus' Latin translation.

Of Origen's remaining works, mention should be made of his *Discussion with Heraclides*, which was discovered in Egypt in 1941. In it, Origen interrogates Heraclides on the latter's Trinitarian orthodoxy, and so the book gives us a useful complement to Origen's other works on that particular subject. There is also his very popular work *On Prayer*, which is the first systematic treatment of that subject by a Christian writer. Origen regards prayer as a supernatural gift, in which the Holy Spirit prays for us. It is the preparation of the soul to receive God, and therefore the foundation of the Christian life. Finally, there is his *Exhortation to martyrdom*, written shortly after the persecution of 235, which was designed to steel believers to meet the challenge of suffering. Origen's own father had been martyred in the persecution of 202, and he himself was to suffer in 251, so the work has a special poignancy, as well as being a first-hand witness to the main challenge which the church of his day had to face.

Origen's theology

Origen has left us a complete theology, which was to be very fruitful in the subsequent development of the Greek tradition (Osborn 1993). He believed that God is a simple, intellectual nature, unbegotten, and the Absolute Being. He also believed in the eternal generation of the Son, whom he described as *homoousios* ('consubstantial') with the Father, the first person known to have used this word in any context. Nevertheless, the Father remains *autotheos* ('God in himself'), and we are left to conclude that the Son is in some way subordinate to him. This has been a very controversial subject in Origenist studies, and several scholars have denied that Origen was subordinationist in his thinking, but it must be admitted that his language is somewhat unguarded at this point, and that it is easy to see how others would have interpreted him in a subordinationist way.

Origen thought of the three 'persons' of the Godhead as *hypostases*, a word which was current in the jargon of ancient philosophy but which is also found in the New Testament (see especially Heb. 1:3). Each hypostasis is fully divine, and it is in and

through them that we meet with God. However, there is an order in this, which may be regarded as a kind of hierarchy. The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in our hearts by faith, giving us a knowledge of the divine. It is his task to reveal the Son to us. The Son in turn is the mediator between God and man, the one who gives us access to the Father, who is in some sense the ultimate divine being. This Trinitarian theology is closely linked to the pattern of Christian experience, and it became the model for subsequent treatments of the subject by the mystical writers of the Greek tradition.

Origen described the incarnate Christ as the God-man (*theanthrōpos*), once more inventing a concept which was to have a long history. It seems that he may also have been the first person to refer to Mary as *theotokos* ('God-bearer'), though this cannot be proved. In his anthropology, Origen was a firm believer in original sin, and therefore in the necessity of infant baptism, but he did not believe in the eternal punishment of the damned. On the contrary, his eschatology was that at the end of time God would refashion the world by a process known as *apokatastasis* ('restoration'), when all existing sin and evil would be destroyed and the whole creation would be reborn. He also believed that the differences of status between people which are evident in this life can be attributed to the sins committed by our souls in a previous existence, and it is this curious form of reincarnation, or *metempsychosis*, which was to get him into so much trouble after his death.

Origen believed that the Bible had three senses, corresponding to the three parts of the human being – body, soul and spirit. The first sense is the literal one, the second is the moral one and the third is the spiritual one. According to him, every passage of Scripture has a spiritual meaning, but not all have a literal or moral one as well. In practical terms, this meant that if the literal or moral sense was offensive, it was necessary to look behind it to the spiritual meaning, which could be discerned by allegory. The Song of Songs provides the classic example of this, but the principle could be applied much more widely. Origen was the real founder of Christian allegorical interpretation (since later writers followed him rather than Hippolytus), and his writings were forerunners of the extravagant interpretations of this kind which proliferated during the Middle Ages. He was criticized for this by Jerome, and his approach has been discounted by modern biblical scholars. On the other hand, it remains influential in mystical circles, to which his allegorical interpretation was closely linked.

Origen was a mystic in his spiritual life, and he developed notions of Christian perfection, of self-knowledge, of asceticism, of the mystical ascent to heaven and of the beatific vision of God which have been found in mystical writing ever since.

Origen became the fountainhead of Greek theology, and there is no writer in that tradition who has not been profoundly influenced by him. His own labours as a pioneer inevitably meant that in many areas his conclusions are tentative and even self-contradictory, and this has been reflected in subsequent controversy. Shortly after his death, the word *homoousios* was taken up by the adoptionist Paul of Samosata and used to such effect that when the fathers of the first council of Nicaea (325) wished to use it to describe the relationship of the Son to the Father, they had to defend themselves against the charge of heresy. Arius, the heretic condemned at Nicaea, also attributed his subordinationist doctrine to Origen, with rather more justification than Paul had had.

Towards the end of the fourth century, Origen was taken up by Jerome and Rufinus, who endeavoured to translate his works into Latin. Jerome soon realized that Origen was defective in his theology, and turned against him, but Rufinus did not and the two men fell out over it. Jerome then sounded the alarm in the Latin world, and Origen came under suspicion in many quarters. However, it was not until the sixth century, when his theology was revived at Constantinople, that real trouble occurred. Old suspicions of his orthodoxy resurfaced, and his writings were studied with great care and attention. The result was that he was condemned as a heretic at the second council of Constantinople in 553, largely because of his reincarnationist ideas. After that, he fell out of favour and his works were seldom copied. Today his greatness is universally acknowledged, but the ambiguity remains, and in spite of the enormous influence which he has exerted, he has never been fully rehabilitated as a Christian thinker and teacher.

LATIN WRITERS

Tertullian

Tertullian was the first Latin Christian writer of any importance, and his works remain one of the great monuments of early Christian thought (Osborn 1997). He is profiled in Chapter 40 of this volume, and further details and bibliography are to be found there. In range and volume they surpass anything which has survived from antiquity before the time of Augustine and Jerome. He deals with everything from the most abstruse points of theology and philosophy to the humblest practical details of everyday life, offering us a complete world-view which is worked out in every detail he can think of. His style is pungent and memorable, provoking either admiration or revulsion, but never indifference.

He was born and brought up in Carthage in the second half of the first century (see Barnes 1985). Evidently his family were well-to-do pagans, and he received the best education which was available at that time. In Tertullian's youth Carthage was the major centre of Latin letters, and the city wore this tradition proudly. Its church was to provide many of the leading theologians and thinkers of the Latin world, and it bowed to no one, not even to Rome. Tertullian reflects both this culture and this attitude, and it may fairly be said that his works set the tone for a distinct North African Christianity which would survive until the Arab invasion (698 CE).

Almost nothing is known for certain about his life. Jerome provides us with some biographical details, but these must be regarded as unreliable. The traditional picture of him as a lawyer who became a presbyter in the Carthaginian church may be correct, but it is not supported by the internal evidence of Tertullian's writings. He must have become a Christian well before 196, when he is known to have been writing highly sophisticated theological treatises, but the details are unknown. He was still writing in 212 and is supposed to have lived to a ripe old age, but we know no more than that.

The biggest problem concerning Tertullian's career is that of his relationship with Montanism, a subject discussed in detail in Chapter 36 of this volume (also see

Trevett 1996). It has traditionally been assumed that he was converted to that sect sometime about 205, and it is possible that he later broke away to found his own group of 'Tertullianists'. This reconstruction is based on internal evidence from his writings and on the fact that there was a sect of Tertullianists in Carthage in the late fourth century. There can be no doubt that Tertullian felt a deep affinity for the Montanists, but this appears to be because their ideas coincided to a great extent with his, not because he was 'converted' to their way of thinking.

It seems that there were a number of Montanist sympathizers in the early third century, and that it was not until their writings were rejected by the Roman church (about 213) that a clear division appeared between them and the mainline church. Tertullian is known to have been personally affronted by the decision to reject the Montanist prophecies, but whether this led him to break with the Carthaginian church in a formal sense is hard to say. We have to remember that his writings were preserved, and not even their Montanist allusions were expurgated, which seems improbable if he were really condemned by the church at that time. It is not until 494 that we hear of an official condemnation of his works (by Pope Gelasius I), and that was much too late to have any serious impact on his reputation or influence.

Tertullian's writings and theology

Tertullian has left us more than thirty treatises (for the Latin texts, see Migne, *Patrologia Latina* Vols 1–2 and the *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* Vols 1–2; Holmes and Thelwall 1885 is an English translation). His works can be subdivided according to theme. It is also customary to label them 'pre-' or 'post-Montanist', but this distinction is more important for their chronology than for an analysis of their content. The first and most famous group of his writings may be described as 'apologetic' because they were formally addressed to pagans or Jews, in an attempt to win them to Christianity. It is not known how effective they were at this, but they have remained defences of the Christian position and some of them are still read and even quoted today.

The first of these treatises is his *Apology*, which must have been written about 196–7 and is generally regarded as one of his earlier works. In this book he demonstrates the absurdity of pagan mythology, and contrasts it with Christian beliefs, which are based on the well-known historical record. Tertullian does not hesitate to claim that the records of Jesus' trial are still available in the archives at Rome, and he appears totally confident that serious investigation of the sources will clear Christians of the charges laid against them by ignorant accusers. In particular, he refutes the claim that they are bad citizens because they do not participate in emperor-worship, and accuses the Roman government of foolishness in its blind mistreatment of what was in fact one of the most loyal and law-abiding elements within it. This is an important witness to Tertullian's understanding of the state, and the relations which the church ought to have with it. Far from being revolutionaries determined to overturn the existing order, Christians were in fact conservative supporters of the empire, whose basic ideals (shorn of their pagan religious associations) they were proud to claim as their own.

Closely resembling the *Apology* is the shorter treatise *To the Nations*, which may in

fact be no more than a rough draft of the former. The only major difference between them is that the *Apology* is addressed to the rulers and magistrates of the empire, whereas *To the Nations* is directed to the general public. On similar themes, there are treatises on idolatry, on the shows in the theatres, on the crown of victory worn by soldiers, and on persecution, the last of which is addressed to Scapula, who was governor of Roman Africa about 212. The main arguments of all these treatises are the same as those found in the *Apology*. Idolatry is absurd, persecution of Christians is illogical, and Christian integrity demands that believers refuse to participate in social events which reinforce the false religious beliefs on which the Roman world was constructed. But to accuse Christians of being disloyal on that account was a misunderstanding, because true loyalty is due to God, whom the Romans have failed to honour properly. What is required is the conversion of Rome to the truth, at which point the conflict between Christian and Roman values will disappear and the former will be revealed as the chief supports of the latter.

Perhaps the most interesting of these treatises is the one *On the Soldier's Crown*, which was apparently occasioned by a historical incident in the army. It seems that a soldier was expected to wear the laurel crown of victory following a successful campaign, but refused to do so on the ground that he was a Christian. He was then court-martialled and executed. Tertullian takes up his cause with great enthusiasm, but runs up against the objection that nowhere does the Bible tell Christians that they should not wear such a crown. Here we see for the first time evidence of Tertullian's 'rigorism', which might also be described as his insistence that basic Christian principles (as he understood them) must be applied to the practical concerns of everyday life. His approach was to argue that the laurel wreath had obvious pagan associations, being particularly associated with the orgiastic cult of the wine-god Bacchus. It was therefore inappropriate for Christians to wear it, even if the circumstances were not particularly compromising in themselves.

Tertullian's contention was that perception is an important part of reality, and that Christians must avoid even the appearance of evil, and it is this belief which governs his rigorism. Other Christians were prepared to be more lenient, and these Tertullian would later brand, in Montanist fashion, as 'psychic' (i.e. 'soul-led') as opposed to the 'spiritual' ones, among whom he numbers himself. But although this terminology came with Montanism, the basic beliefs underlying it can be traced right back to the beginning of his career.

Tertullian also wrote a tract against the Jews, which is basically a defence of the Christian interpretation of Old Testament prophecy. In keeping with his literalistic and historic bent, he gives a detailed account of the prophecies in the book of Daniel, comparing the reigns of the various Hellenistic rulers to what the book predicted. In general however, he follows the arguments of Paul in his epistle to the Romans, particularly in his exposition of the place of the gentiles in God's plan of salvation.

Of special interest are his short treatise on *The Testimony of the Soul* and the much longer work *On the Soul*, in which Tertullian expounds his teaching about human nature, drawing at least as much on the resources of ancient philosophy as on Holy Scripture. Tertullian is often portrayed as an anti-philosophical writer, but this is a misrepresentation. It is true that he was openly anti-Platonic at a time when

Platonism was enjoying a revival of interest and creativity, but his criticisms of philosophy can be paralleled in other writers who made ample use of Platonic ideas. The truth is that he was a Stoic 'materialist', who believed that all reality was essentially material, including the spirits and even God. He has been strongly attacked for this notion, but in his favour it can be said that at least he was able to develop a theory of reality in which the spiritual and the natural worlds interacted without the kind of conflict which was endemic to Platonism. In this way, Tertullian was able to avoid the dualism characteristic of Platonic writers and to remain more faithful to the biblical vision of reality, even if he misunderstood it in other ways.

Like many works of its kind, *On the Soul* contains a number of interesting digressions into such areas as dreams and ecstatic experiences, which so fascinated the ancients. The work concludes with the assertion that all souls are kept in hell until the resurrection, when their ultimate fate will be decreed, even though it is already known in advance. With his materialistic outlook, Tertullian was naturally a 'traducianist' in his understanding of the soul. That is to say that he believed that the soul of each individual is inherited from parents, not created independently at the moment of conception. In this respect, his view is closer to modern beliefs about genetic inheritance than the majority opinion among his contemporaries. It may be added that Tertullian also believed that sin is a stain on the soul, passed on from one generation to the next, so that it is impossible for any human being to be born in a state of innocence.

The next class of Tertullian's works is directed against the heresies of his time. In these treatises he shows himself at his most vicious, not hesitating to impugn the morality of his opponents. He even calls Marcion a 'mouse' because he came from Pontus, which the Greeks believed was the home of mice. (In modern Greek, the word for 'mouse' is *pontiki*.) This characteristic is distasteful to most modern readers, but it was par for the course among ancient rhetoricians, and can be paralleled without difficulty in the writings of the sixteenth-century reformers, so Tertullian should not be blamed too severely for it.

Of the individual books, pride of place belongs to *The Prescription Against Heretics*, because it is in this work that Tertullian outlines his basic principles. These are that heresy is a disease which preys on the weakness of the flesh, that it derives from an addiction to pagan philosophy (see above, under 'Hippolytus'), and that it can only be combated by sticking firmly to the 'rule of faith', which is Christian doctrine as revealed in Scripture. Heretics cannot read the Bible because they cannot understand it, and when they attempt to use it to justify their arguments they merely show how ignorant and inept they are.

Tertullian also claims that the apostles conveyed the whole of Christian truth to the church, an assertion which goes directly against the gnostic belief in a 'secret gospel' which was supposedly kept for those who were specially initiated. This belief is of particular importance when it comes to assessing Tertullian's view of the Montanist prophecies. He evidently believed that they were inspired by God, but not that they added anything of substance to the apostolic deposit. Montanism, like Tertullian's own statements, was an intensification of what was already known and believed – an exhortation to live up to the principles revealed to the apostles, rather than a new departure in the spiritual realm.

Tertullian's longest work is his five-volume book *Against Marcion*, which is a major defence of the unity of the two testaments. Marcion rejected the Old Testament on the ground that its God was a creator-deity inferior to the Father of Jesus Christ. Marcion also expurgated large parts of the New Testament, which appeared to him to be infected with Judaism. Tertullian refutes all this in great detail, by demonstrating among other things that even the parts of the New Testament which Marcion retained (Luke's Gospel and the Pauline epistles) are incomprehensible without taking the Jewish background into account. He goes on to describe how Christ is himself the creator, whose incarnation was predicted by the Old Testament prophets, and cleverly bases his argument exclusively on those parts of the New Testament which Marcion was prepared to accept. The result is a commentary on Luke and Paul which upholds the literal and historical interpretation of the Bible.

Tertullian also wrote treatises against the gnostics Hermogenes and Valentinus, in which he refutes their ideas as absurd and untenable on their own premises, quite apart from the fact that they are incompatible with scripture. Against Hermogenes, he argues that matter cannot be eternal, because if it is there would be two ultimate principles, and therefore two gods behind the universe. Furthermore, Hermogenes effectively made matter superior to God, and therefore on his own principles regarded evil as more important than good, even though he claimed the opposite. In response to this, Tertullian says that only the biblical doctrine of creation out of nothing can account for the co-existence of spirit and matter in a single universe. The Valentinians were relatively easier to refute, because their fantastic theories were so ludicrous, being a mish-mash of mythology and biblical ideas.

Two other treatises, *On the Flesh of Christ* and *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, are also anti-gnostic in intention, being directed against the views of men like Marcion and Apelles. They are presented in the form of defences of key Christian doctrines, which everyone recognized as fundamental in the struggle against all forms of philosophical rationalism or mysticism. Tertullian argues that Christ really did become a man and live an ordinary human life. His death on the cross was the ultimate proof of his humanity. Furthermore, it was necessary that Christ should have assumed a human nature, complete with a human soul, since his purpose in coming to earth was to save the human race. Without a genuine incarnation there could have been no resurrection, and therefore no salvation either. In the process, Tertullian develops the view that the Son of God is a divine person who takes on a human nature without giving up his divinity, a doctrine which anticipates the two-natures Christology of the council of Chalcedon (451), which remains the touchstone of Christological orthodoxy in the western church.

The Resurrection of the Flesh continues the argument, concentrating on the goodness of creation, a view which was denied not only by the gnostics but by the whole Platonic tradition which lay behind them. The resurrection of the flesh is not only a biblical teaching; it is also the ultimate affirmation of the rightness of God's plan from the beginning. Much of the treatise is concerned with practical issues, such as the nature of the resurrected flesh, and Tertullian draws heavily on the apostle Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 15.

The last major anti-heretical work is the treatise *Against Praxeas*, in which Tertullian develops his Trinitarian theology. The identity of Praxeas is uncertain, and the

name may be an epithet meaning 'busybody', but whoever he was, he was evidently responsible for convincing the Roman church that the Montanists were in error, and this is what excited Tertullian's wrath. Tertullian's Trinitarianism begins with the assumption that God is One, but that within that One it is necessary to distinguish Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Praxeas appears to be a monarchian rather like Sabellius, believing that these names are no more than masks representing different roles played by the One God in the drama of human history. The Trinity is not a covert form of polytheism, but a faithful reflection of the inner being of God, which can be detected even in the Old Testament.

Praxeas made use of some biblical texts to support his view, but he handled them ineptly. In particular, he completely misunderstood Jesus' statement that 'I and the Father are One' (John 10:30). Tertullian goes through large sections of the Fourth Gospel to show how that verse must be placed in its Trinitarian context, and in the process takes the opportunity to develop his views on the Paraclete, who is the third divine person. Once again, the terminology may be Montanist but the underlying belief is in complete harmony with everything Tertullian wrote and believed from the start of his career.

Two other treatises against heresies may be mentioned briefly. The first is called the *Scorpiace*, or antidote against the scorpion's sting. The scorpion is heresy, and the antidote is the teaching of scripture as summed up in the rule of faith. The second treatise is called simply *Against all Heresies*, and is a short catalogue of the different sects and their beliefs. It is generally regarded as spurious.

The third class of Tertullian's works consists of a group of treatises dealing with different aspects of the Christian life. One of them covers the subject of repentance, which Tertullian says is a supernatural gift applicable in principle to any sin, material or spiritual. It is enjoined on us by God's command, quite apart from the spiritual benefits which accrue from practising it. However, repentance is something which cannot be repudiated without losing one's salvation completely. In particular, it is the essential precondition for baptism, which is not to be undertaken without clear assurances that the candidate has indeed turned away from his sins. Nevertheless, Tertullian holds out the possibility of a second repentance for sins committed after baptism, although he does his best to make such a thing seem as anomalous as possible.

Tertullian's treatise on baptism also belongs in this category, and is of special interest because of his objection to the practice of infant baptism. This was because Tertullian believed that baptism takes effect automatically, regardless of the faith of the person receiving it (a view known as *ex opere operato*), and that a baby ran the risk of growing up and falling ignorantly into sin, thereby losing its salvation. Furthermore, it is in this treatise that Tertullian makes it clear that if someone has sinned after water baptism, the only remedy is the baptism in blood – martyrdom. This theme is not developed here, but it points to the increasingly rigorist position which he, and much of the church, would gradually adopt.

Other treatises in this category are one on prayer, which begins with an exposition of the Lord's Prayer and then concentrates heavily on practical matters, such as the right posture to adopt when praying. The order of priorities sounds strange to us, but it accurately reflects Tertullian's outlook. He was always concerned to demon-

strate how spiritual principles should be applied, and there is no doubt that many people must have been helped by the clear directions which he gives. He also wrote an exhortation addressed to the martyrs, in order to encourage them to stand fast in the face of persecution. The most interesting thing about this is the way in which he draws his examples from the ancient Roman heroes, rather than from the Bible. Perhaps he felt that his hearers would relate to their national traditions more easily than to a Scripture which for many would still have been only half-absorbed. This treatise must be read in tandem with another, *On Flight in Persecution*, which deals with the same theme of martyrdom and encourages Christians to face it boldly. Tertullian was determined to turn what many saw as a tragedy into a triumph of faith, and thereby forward the gospel, because, as he himself said, 'the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church'.

Further to these, there is a treatise on patience which extols this virtue as a sign of God's presence in the Christian's life. Impatience is regarded as the work of Satan. Furthermore, Christian patience is active and forward-looking, unlike pagan patience, which is basically inertia and indifference, and therefore merely superficial. Apart from a short book on fasting and one which somewhat satirically proclaims the virtues of the philosopher's cloak, the remaining treatises deal with questions relating to women, matrimony and chastity. Like many Christians in antiquity, Tertullian was greatly exercised by these themes, though his way of dealing with them is not without originality.

Tertullian believed that matrimony is ordained by God, but he did not believe in sexual intercourse. His ideal was virginity, of which the noblest form was that of voluntary self-denial. A married couple who abstained for times of prayer and fasting were giving up something to which they were theoretically entitled, and were therefore superior to those who had no obvious opportunity to exercise such restraint. When challenged by the New Testament, which clearly does not support such a view, Tertullian replied that things have moved on since apostolic times. The apostles knew the truth, but they also knew that it was impossible to change people overnight. By a special divine dispensation they were permitted to make concessions, particularly in this sphere. Younger widows were allowed to get married again, for example, and although married women were expected to cover their heads, nothing was said about unmarried virgins.

Tertullian regarded it as his duty to point out that with the coming of the Holy Spirit in power and the announcement of the approaching end of time, these concessions and loopholes must now be closed. Here more than anywhere we can see the influence of Montanism on his thought. He even went to the point of telling his wife that it was better not to conceive, because if Christ were to return before the nine months were up, she would be pregnant in eternity — not a happy prospect. This sounds absurd to us, but underlying much of Tertullian's concern was the fact that ancient Roman religion was a cult of ancestor worship, in which children were necessary in order to guarantee that the parents would be remembered after their death. Against that background, the Christian had to proclaim that eternal life could be had only in Christ, whose church transcended the limitations of flesh and blood.

Tertullian's theology

Tertullian's theology was rooted in an Old Testament understanding of God. His Trinitarianism, for example, was based on Isa. 6:3, the famous 'holy, holy, holy' (see Bray 1979). According to him, Father, Son and Holy Spirit were the three holies in the one holiness of God. The goal of the Christian is to be made holy too, because fellowship with him is God's will for us. Tertullian invented the word 'Trinity' as a translation of the Greek word *trias*, and he was the first writer to speak of 'persons' in the Godhead. This caused misunderstanding later on, because it was not clear that a 'person' had the characteristics of autonomous being which were inherent in a 'hypostasis'. The matter was not sorted out until the time of Basil of Caesarea (329–79), who declared that the two concepts were synonymous, a belief which was finally enshrined in the church's official doctrine at the council of Chalcedon. Before that, many people assumed that by 'person' Tertullian meant 'mask', and that his teaching was just a form of Sabellianism (modalism). This would have denied the reality of the persons and reduced them to roles in the divine drama of salvation, a view which Tertullian would certainly have repudiated.

Despite his opposition to Judaism, Tertullian had a high opinion of the Old Testament and rejected attempts to interpret it allegorically. He saw a parallel between the Jews and the Romans, both of whom had an ancient law to govern them, and he tried to harmonize the two as much as he could. When Jesus told his disciples that their righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20), Tertullian understood this to mean that Christians must be even more legalistic than they were, because the gospel was a 'new law' (*nova lex*).

In other matters, Tertullian's views compare favourably with the orthodoxy of the fourth and fifth centuries. It can be said, for example, that he believed that Christ was one divine person in two natures, even though he did not use that precise formula. Similarly, his doctrine of the Holy Spirit can be harmonized with later teaching without any difficulty, even if his way of expressing it is less precise than what later controversies required. Perhaps it is for this reason that he retained his currency as a theologian into the fifth century, and was accepted by Jerome and Augustine as an equal. His Montanist affiliations have never been a barrier to appreciating him, even if his eschatology and the rigorism which went with it have long since been abandoned. Today he remains a living voice in the church in a way which cannot be said of his great Greek contemporary, Origen, and he continues to be respected as the founder of western Trinitarianism.

Cyprian

Cyprian was born at Carthage about 200, apparently to a family of wealth and social standing. He became a noted rhetorician, well connected socially and politically, before converting to Christianity under the influence of the presbyter Caecilius (Sage 1975). He was a great admirer of Tertullian, but does not seem to have known him personally. This may be because Tertullian had died before Cyprian's conversion, or because he had separated himself from the church. The latter must be regarded as unlikely however, since Cyprian's great aversion to division in the church (Hinchliff

1974) is hard to reconcile with admiration for a notorious schismatic. About 248 he became bishop of Carthage, a post which he retained until he was arrested and martyred on 14 September 258.

There are about thirteen different works attributed to Cyprian which have survived (the Latin texts are in Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Supplement I.34–7 and in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* Vol. 3; for an English translation, Wallis 1886). Most of them are short pieces and many reflect the influence of Tertullian. In fact it is no exaggeration to say that, apart from the lack of any Montanist tinge and the more irenic style, their content and theology are indistinguishable from the writings of the man Cyprian regarded as his 'master'. On the other hand, he was more inclined to accept allegorical interpretations of the Bible (see Fahey 1971) than Tertullian was, a fact which can be seen from his treatise on the Lord's Prayer, which understands the 'daily bread' for example, as Christ's body given to us in the Eucharist. Cyprian also develops the notion that pagan idols are ancient kings who were worshipped after their death. This is in line with the Roman predilection for ancestor worship, but it is not an idea found in Tertullian. Cyprian also wrote a spiritual autobiography which he addressed to his friend Donatus (not to be confused with the later schismatic of the same name). This anticipates the *Confessions* of Augustine, which it resembles in both style and content, rather than anything which went before.

Cyprian's two most important works are *On the Lapsed* and *On the Unity of the Church*, and it is for them that he is best remembered today. In the first of these he deals with the vexed question of penance for those who have fallen away and who wish to be restored to the fellowship of the church. This was always a difficult problem, especially in North Africa, where rigorism was to some extent endemic in the church. Cyprian takes a moderate line, advocating the possibility of penance for the lapsed but discouraging any kind of leniency.

In the second work, he deals with the theme which was closest to his heart. Schism was an ever-present danger, and it had to be avoided at all costs (Hinchliff 1974). This was not just because a persecuted church could not afford the luxury of division, but because the gospel message could only be credible if the church maintained its unity. Truth is one, and if those who maintain it are divided the credibility of their faith is called into question. Cyprian believed that divisions in the church were the work of Satan, and that rooting them out was therefore part of the mission to purify the body of Christ. He also believed that there is no salvation outside the church, a phrase which has become embedded in later tradition.

This led him to reject the baptism of heretics, a policy which got him into trouble with Rome, which recognized the validity of Trinitarian baptism whoever administered it. The Roman policy would later prevail in the church at large, but Cyprian did not hesitate to differ with his Roman counterparts and reject their understanding of the matter. This shows that he did not accept that the Roman see had any special entitlement to jurisdictional authority, let alone to doctrinal infallibility, merely because it had been the see of Peter. It seems that Cyprian originally included a passage on Petrine primacy as part of chapter four of his book on the unity of the church, but deleted it during this controversy in order not to be misunderstood.

There is little more to be said about his theology, which shows few signs of originality. In contrast to Tertullian, he believed that infants should be baptized as soon as possible, so as not to lose their salvation, which probably also means that he was less of a perfectionist than Tertullian was. On the other hand, it cannot be stressed too often that in the ancient church leniency in such matters was rare, and there is no doubt that Cyprian expected high standards of his flock. Another interesting feature of his writings is that he clearly understood the Eucharist in sacrificial terms, which was unusual, though by no means unprecedented in his day.

Today, it is as the teacher of unity that he is most often remembered. His dictum that there is no salvation outside the church is still officially accepted by some Christians, though in recent years it has been reinterpreted to the point where it is hard to say whether it really means what Cyprian intended it to mean. Other Christians either reject it outright or interpret it in a purely spiritual sense, which was clearly not Cyprian's original intention.

Novatian

Novatian belongs to the first generation at Rome which used Latin as its medium of theological expression. He was a presbyter of the Roman church who was highly regarded as one of the most brilliant men of his day. When Pope Fabian died on 20 January 250, Novatian assumed the direction of the Roman church during the interregnum, which lasted just over a year, during which the church was severely persecuted. When it at last became possible to elect a bishop, the Roman presbyters chose another of their number, Cornelius, much to Novatian's disgust. He managed to gain the support of three bishops in southern Italy who agreed to consecrate him, and set himself up as a rival pope for several years. His followers were numerous and persistent, and there developed a Novatianist schism which lasted for nearly three centuries after his death.

Novatian's end is not recorded, but it is generally supposed that he died a martyr, probably during the persecution of 258. In 1932 a tomb was discovered at Rome honouring the 'blessed martyr Novatian' and this may be his, though there is no indication on it of his episcopal title. It seems that the main reason why Novatian was rejected in 251 was that he took an extremely rigorous line against those who had lapsed during the persecution. Cornelius was in favour of readmitting them after due penance, but Novatian wanted them to be permanently excluded from communion. His attitude smacked of Montanism, and some people apparently assumed that he hailed from Phrygia, the province in Asia Minor where Montanus had preached. Certainly there are many affinities between him and Tertullian, which are reflected in his writings.

Novatian has left us four treatises (see the Latin texts in Migne, *Patrologia Latina* Vol. 3: 861–970, and an English translation in Wallis 1886). Two of his works (on modesty and on theatrical entertainments) are merely versions of similar writings by Tertullian. A third book deals with the Jewish food laws in the Old Testament, which Novatian believed must be understood in a spiritual sense. However, by far his most important work is his treatise *On the Trinity*, which accomplishes the remarkable feat of dealing systematically with that doctrine without ever once

mentioning the word 'Trinity' itself – the title was probably added later (see de Simone 1970).

This work was the most systematic of its kind in existence when it first appeared, and it follows the arrangement of the old Roman creed. Novatian gives an entirely conventional exposition of the essence and attributes of God, and has a two-natures Christology without using that terminology. However, there is a noticeable tendency towards subordinationism in his work, which stresses the fundamental unity of the divine being and the eternal immanence of the Logos inside it. Novatian is also rather weak on the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the other persons of the Godhead, though he goes into great detail about the relationship of the Spirit to the church. Like Tertullian, he is important for the vocabulary he uses, and it seems that he is the first person to employ the word 'predestination' as a translation of the Greek *proorismos*. Like Tertullian, his philosophical leanings were towards Stoicism, and this affects his theological method, which tends to be inductive and dialectical rather than deductive in the Platonic style.

Novatian has always been greatly admired for his style and his acute theological perception, and in spite of his schismatic history his works have never been condemned by the church.

Lactantius

Lactantius is the last of the major pre-Nicene Latin theologians. Little is known of his life except that he is supposed to have been of North African origin, with his birthdate around 250 CE. In 303 he was teaching at the catechetical school of Nicomedia, in Bithynia, but he resigned in that year when persecution broke out. He apparently left Asia Minor about 307, but no more is heard of him until 317, when he was invited by the emperor Constantine to go to Trier to be tutor to his eldest son (see Fontaine and Perrin 1978). Lactantius is often called the Christian Cicero, and his writings are in many ways closer to Ciceronian philosophy than they are to anything distinctively Christian. The Latin texts are in Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vols 6 and 7, and they are translated into English by Fletcher (1886).

This is particularly true of his work *On God's Workmanship*, which is a treatise in praise of the human body. It is clearly anti-Platonic in tone, but both the style and content owe more to Roman Stoicism than they do to Christianity. Two other works deal with the anger of God and the death of persecutors. The first of these proclaims that God is active within his creation, and the second assures the reader that he will not be slow to punish those who have persecuted the church.

Lactantius' most important work is his *Divine Institutes*, which is intended to be a complete summary of Christian thought. In this work, Lactantius refutes paganism and all forms of rationalism, claiming that revelation is necessary for the truth to be understood. There is a strong emphasis on providence, rather than on a more personal theology, and Lactantius stresses moral behaviour rather than true spirituality. He seems to have a dualistic view of creation, giving evil much the same status as good. He says little or nothing about the Holy Spirit, and believes that each soul is created at birth. There are also indications that he had millenarian views, though these are less prominent than in other writers of the period.

The *Deaths of the Persecutors* (c. 314) aims to show that all persecutors meet a bad end, as exemplified by Diocletian, Galerius and Maximinus Daia (see Creed 1984).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it may be said that the third century saw the rise of an embryonic systematic theology in both the Greek and the Latin worlds. During this period there was little interaction between them, and that would lead to misunderstanding later on when different forms of expression were thought to conceal heretical beliefs. It is also true that the greatest theologians, Origen in the East and Tertullian in the West, would prove to be unsatisfactory in the eyes of later generations, though for very different reasons. Yet in spite of this, the broad lines of theological thought which they developed have remained visible ever since in their respective traditions, and are still fruitful today. Without the theology of this period, forged against the background of a persecuted church, the subsequent history of Christianity would have been very different, and undoubtedly poorer both intellectually and spiritually. We owe a permanent debt to these thinkers, whose reputations have survived not only the test of time, but also the repudiation of many of their most characteristic opinions.

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LATER THEOLOGICIANS OF THE GREEK EAST



Andrew Louth

INTRODUCTION

The later theologians of the Greek East belong to another world from that of their predecessors. Their predecessors faced the threat, and often the reality, of persecution by a hostile Roman state, while the later Greek theologians lived in a world where Christianity was first tolerated and then gradually became the official religion of the Roman empire. This radical change of orientation posed enormous problems for the church; ultimately, problems of identity. During the first three centuries of its existence, the church had grown remarkably but still remained a group of relatively small and isolated communities. The long catechumenate that preceded baptism, together with the reality that martyrdom might well be a corollary of being a Christian, gave Christians a strong sense of identity over against the 'world' of the pagan society of the Roman empire. This sense of a tight-knit community was reinforced by celebration of the Eucharist reserved for the baptized, excommunication of those who failed in their Christian vocation, by serious moral failing, as well as by apostasy, and the power of the local bishop over the local church. The fourth century CE saw changes that forced Christians to reformulate their sense of identity, or rather drastically adapt the organs of identity they had developed. This was the context in which the later Greek theologians articulated their understanding of Christianity.

One important factor for the development of theology was what one might call the growing 'ecumenicity' of the church; that is, the sense of the unity of the church throughout the whole *oikoumene* or 'inhabited world', as the Romans called their empire. The church had always believed that it was one, but this unity had primarily meant unity with the whole church from Adam onwards, and especially unity with the martyrs who, on their heavenly birthday, as their day of martyrdom was called, had become part of the church in heaven. This 'vertical' sense of unity always entailed an 'horizontal' unity, a unity of faith and communion, articulated through the episcopacy. But in the conditions of persecution this horizontal sense of unity had been difficult to realize, though notable efforts were made from the kind of pastoral care of one church for another manifest in I Clement, through the activity of episcopal meetings, called synods, to the kind of witness to the unity of the church

throughout the Mediterranean world found in Bishop Averkios' famous inscription (Lightfoot 1885: 476–85). Imperial patronage almost immediately made available to the church the possibility – or necessity – of undreamt-of horizontal unity. The emperor Constantine felt the need for the united prayers of a united church, and this provided an additional pressure on the church to seek to articulate its unity. Such unity meant unity of teaching ('doctrinal unity') because Christians had long claimed not just to offer an effective way of religious contact with the divine, but also truth: about God himself (what came to be called *theologia*), and the way He dealt with the world (his management of the world, or *oikonomia*).

The growth of ecumenical authority

Decisions about such matters were made by synods (or councils, but 'synod' was the Christian word),¹ which had already evolved at a local level in the first three centuries. The period from the peace of the church (312) to 431, the date of the Council of Ephesus, is marked by a series of church synods, three of which were to be recognized as 'ecumenical'; that is, authoritative for the whole *oikoumene*. Many of the decisions of these synods took the form of 'canons' (as decisions of church law were called) governing the life of the church, which came to have the force of the Roman legal system, and through which the church began to shape its sense of its own identity as the organ of the official religion of the empire. But ecumenical synods (and those that claimed to be ecumenical) were also concerned with doctrinal matters – especially with teaching concerning the Trinitarian nature of God and the union of divine and human in Christ – which were central to later Greek theology. The first three synods, which were held at Nicaea in 325, Constantinople in 381, and Ephesus in 431, concerned themselves with these fundamental doctrinal issues (and such concern continued through the rest of the seven synods regarded as ecumenical, the last of which was held in Nicaea in 787).

The first three ecumenical synods mark out the fundamental doctrinal concerns of the church in the period up to 431: Nicaea I was concerned with the status of the Son of God in relation to the Father; Constantinople I ostensibly with the divinity of the Spirit, and the beginning of discussion over the nature of union of divine and human in Christ, but perhaps more fundamentally with reaffirming Nicaea as the standard for the religious orthodoxy that the Emperor Theodosius wanted to make the sole system of valid belief for the empire; Ephesus was concerned with the central Christological issue (not finally settled until the Third Synod of Constantinople in 680–1), that of affirming the unity of Christ, while acknowledging the reality and integrity of his divine and human natures.

NICAEA AND THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

The Synod of Nicaea was called to settle a dispute between the pope of Alexandria, Alexander, and one of his presbyters, Arius.² There are differing accounts in the church historians about the precise origins of the dispute, but the nature of the dispute is clear, and concerned how to understand the relationship between God

the Father and the Son of God. Behind the ideas of them both lay earlier attempts to understand this relationship by the Apologists and especially by Origen, attempts that revolved round the notion of the Logos.

Pre-Nicene theology

Earlier theologians had thought of the Logos as mediating between the inaccessible simplicity of God the Father and the multiplicity of the world; they had invoked the Logos as the subject of the theophanies of the Old Testament, and as incarnate in Jesus Christ. They also thought of the Logos as lying behind the harmonious structure of the world, and the human capacity to perceive this harmony as due to human participation in the Logos, a participation that rendered them *logikoi*, or rational. As an in-between being, the Logos had a shifting valency, his closeness to God the Father being affirmed when it was a matter of emphasizing the genuineness of his manifestation of God; his closeness to the human being asserted when his role in validating human understanding (not least of God) was emphasized.

Within Origen's whole theological ontology, this shifting valency was simply a matter of emphasis. For Origen endorsed one of the fundamental tenets of Platonist metaphysics, according to which the most important ontological distinction was that between the spiritual (or *noetic*) world and the world of the senses, the former being eternal, the latter transitory. To the spiritual world belonged God the Father, the Logos, and rational beings, the *logikoi* (which included not just humans, but angels and demons, too). Origen's doctrine of the eternal generation of the Logos affirmed his closeness to the Father, but did not distinguish him fundamentally from the *logikoi*, who also partook of eternity.

By the beginning of the fourth century, however, Origen's doctrine of the pre-existence of souls, which was part of this world-view, had been damagingly attacked (by, among others, Alexander's predecessor but one, Peter). Without that doctrine, Origen's pattern of teaching lost something of its coherence. Both Arius' doctrine and Alexander's can be seen as ways of recovering coherence. Alexander affirms the coeternity of the Logos with the Father, while Arius rejects any doctrine of the Logos' inherent eternity, and places him among those beings that are transitory in themselves. The writings of both Arius and Alexander are preserved only in fragmentary form, so it is difficult to form any impression of their overall doctrine, but Arius is perhaps the more radical of the two, and is one of the first to affirm what was to become the central tenet of Christian metaphysics; namely, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.

Arius

For Arius, everything other than God himself, that is the Father, is created out of nothing by the will of God: the fundamental ontological divide is between the uncreated God and the creation. That the Logos (or the Son, as he generally calls him) must belong on the created side of the divide is entailed by his monotheism, his belief that there is one God; several uncreated beings would entail several gods. But though created, the Son is different from all other creatures in being the 'Only-

begotten', the first of God's creatures, through whom all other creatures have been created. Arius is often presented (also by his contemporaries) as a cold logician, in contrast to the ardent faith, tolerant of logical muddle, that characterizes the orthodox. That may well be unfair (as it also is to the orthodox). For although Arius emphasizes the radical divide that separates the Son from the Father – the Son does not know the Father, he is foreign to the Father – so far as humans are concerned, the Son represents all they can know of the Father, he is a faithful image of the Father, and through the Son humans can approach the Father and offer him true worship. A glimpse of the devotional theology that this implies can be seen in the sermon Eusebius of Caesarea gave at the consecration of the Christian basilica in Tyre after the end of the persecution: 'the worship of the Church on earth led by the bishop in his basilica is a copy of the worship of the church in heaven led by Christ Himself. We worship God as God made manifest to us, and through Him worship the Father of all.'³

Nicaea and the homoousion

Arius was condemned at the Synod of Nicaea for refusing assent to a creed, drawn up by the synod, that included the keyword *homoousios*, consubstantial, 'one in being', to describe the relationship of the Son to the Father; this relationship was also described as being 'out of the being of the Father', and called being begotten, in explicit contrast to being created. It is not clear how the creed was drawn up, or why the word *homoousios* was used, though Arius had already rejected the term as 'Manichaean' (materialist, in this context?).⁴ Nor is it clear what the fathers of the synod made of the term; Eusebius of Caesarea give the only contemporary interpretation, which is minimalist.⁵ After the death of Constantine in 337, series of synods called over the next two decades make it clear there was little support in the East for the doctrine of the *homoousion*, and even Athanasius rarely uses the term, save in connexion with the Nicene synod, until the late 360s. The eventual victory for the 'Nicene' doctrine of the *homoousion* is due in large measure to the efforts of Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers.

Athanasius

Athanasius was a young deacon, accompanying his bishop Alexander of Alexandria, at the Synod of Nicaea, and probably played little part in the proceedings of the synod, despite later claims to the contrary. In 328 he succeeded Alexander as pope of Alexandria; by then he was probably barely 30, as there were claims that he was under the canonical age. He spent the rest of his life administering his huge diocese, when he was not in exile for his opposition to imperial religious policy, which in the East abandoned Nicaea from the death of Constantine until the accession of Theodosius in 379. His writings, therefore, are far from systematic; it is, however, possible to discern in them the outline of a profound theological vision, which it is fair to say was to cast its spell over nearly all later Greek theology.

His theological vision

This vision is expressed in Athanasius' two-part treatise, *Contra Gentes—De Incarnatione*,⁶ an early work, though whether it is the work of his precocious youth, or a moment of tranquillity early on in his episcopate (for there is no clear allusion to Arianism) is disputed. The first part is in the tradition of apologetic (that is, a defence of Christianity against Greek philosophical culture), while the second part is more deeply theological. The treatise as a whole establishes an overall contemplative context: the human person is created to contemplate God, contemplation itself being a transforming activity (as with Origen, one is what one contemplates). This contemplative dimension of human existence is founded on the fact that humans are created, *kat' eikona tou Theou*, according to the image of God, which Athanasius takes to mean, following most earlier Greek theologians, that human beings are created in accordance with the Logos, who is himself the image of God. Humans are 'in the image', because they are *logikoi*, rational, and thus it is in the soul or intellect that the image is principally to be found (CG 2; Inc. 3). The soul functions as a kind of mirror (CG 8, 34), in which one can see reflected the image of God, that is the Word, and through contemplation of the Word, one is led to contemplate the original, of which the Word is the image, that is the Father.

But – and here Athanasius parts company with Origen, and pursues the insight he shares with his opponent, Arius – human beings are *created* in the image of God, and for Athanasius, as for Arius, this means created out of nothing, *ex nihilo* (cf. Inc. 2–3). Athanasius explores deeply the meaning of being created. On the one hand, being created out of nothing means that there is nothing as such in being created that is opposed to God; in its relationship with God there is no limit to what it may become, indeed the goal of creation (at least rational creation) is deification, becoming God. This establishes the fundamental arc of Greek theology, an arc that passes from creation to deification, and within which everything else – including the Fall and redemption – has a subordinate place. But there is another side to being created, for being created out of nothing means that once the creature loses hold of its relationship to the Creator, it loses hold on being itself, and begins to slip into non-existence. This indeed happened to the human creation, and this is what is meant by the Fall. Fallen creation slides into non-existence; it falls prey to what Athanasius calls corruption and death, *phthora* and *thanatos*, which stalk through the pages of *de Incarnatione* like a couple of avenging furies. This is a corruption of what things are, of their being or nature; it is not a superficial rust (Inc. 44). In human beings, this corruption eats into the state of being in image of God (the *kat' eikona*, as Athanasius puts it), which begins to disappear (Athanasius uses the verb in the imperfect): this negative corrosion ultimately leads to death. Contemplation of God fails (Athanasius suggests that contemplation in fallen creatures is directed to the nothingness of creatures, instead of God), and human beings cease to know God. Lack of knowledge of God, and a nature dissolving through corruption: this is the result of the Fall. And Athanasius argues that only the embracing of humanity, that is the living of a human life, by the Word who is in himself the Image of God can arrest the effects of the Fall. The Word made flesh came and preached and thus restored the knowledge of God; more fundamentally by assuming humanity he restored the image, in

accordance with which we were created; more fundamentally still, by encountering death in his humanity he destroyed the power of death, and manifested the 'grace of the resurrection' (*Inc.* 21). In *de Incarnatione*, which is, after all, the theological conclusion to an apology, this is presented with objective starkness: there is little about the church, the life of faith, or the Holy Spirit. But everything in Athanasius' mature theology can be traced back to the theological vision outlined in this work.

Athanasius' understanding of the homoousion

In his works against the Arians, Athanasius worked out an understanding of the *homoousion* that was to be determinative for later orthodoxy. But it is clear from his writings that only gradually did the language of the *homoousion* come to form part of his own theological vocabulary. What was fundamental for Athanasius was to acknowledge that the Son (and eventually the Spirit) belonged with the Father as uncreated beings. For him the *homoousion* was fundamentally relational: the Son was to be confessed as *homoousios with* the Father, which he understood as expressing 'full unbroken continuation of being' (Stead 1977: 263, quoting Robertson). But this could be expressed in a variety of ways, of which the *homoousion* was simply one. The reason for this insistence on the uncreated status of the Son was twofold. First, like Arius, he saw that creation *ex nihilo* implies that the fundamental division of Christian metaphysics is between the uncreated and the created, there is no in-between. Second, the Son could only repair the consequences of the Fall, which saw the whole created order sliding into nothingness, if he were himself uncreated; any creature would be implicated in the Fall. Further, and perhaps more fundamentally, only God can deify; anything less than God would represent a limit to the potentially limitless movement of deification. The purpose of the Incarnation, then, is not simply to redeem, but to deify: 'he became human, that we might be deified' (*Inc.* 54). A consequence of the Son being uncreated, *homoousios with* the Father, is the need to define and defend the unity of God: does the existence of two uncreated beings mean, as Arius argued, the denial of monotheism? Athanasius clearly thought not, neither did he think that the divine unity demanded by monotheism could be secured by arguing that the uncreated divine beings were one in purpose, harmony, or will. Rather Athanasius argues that the unity of Father and Son is to be found on the ontological level. But he expresses this by using traditional analogies and arguments: the Son is to the Father as radiance to the sun, or a river flowing from a spring; the very notion of Father implies a Son; the Son is the Father's wisdom, or the Father's will. He makes use of more formal ontological language, but not systematically, mentioning the 'oneness of being (*ousia*)' manifesting the 'sameness of Godhead', and affirming that the nature (*physis*) the Father and the Son share is one (*Contra Arianos* 3.3–4). Athanasius' success in fighting against those he (somewhat unfairly) regarded as 'Arians' was sealed by the synod he called at Alexandria in 362 (taking advantage of the truce for exiled bishops declared by the emperor Julian), when he secured agreement between those eastern bishops, like himself, who saw little difference between the terms *ousia* and *hypothesis*, and understood both to refer to the unity of the Godhead, and other eastern bishops (who may

be called 'Origenian' in this respect) who used the term *hypostasis* to refer to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in their distinctness. There were those who refused to accept this – 'Homoeans', who believed that the Son was like the Father and who retained the political ascendancy for another decade or so and 'Anomoeans', who believed that the Son was unlike the Father – but they failed to withstand the Cappadocian defence of orthodoxy that built on Athanasius' achievement at Alexandria in 362.

Athanasius and the Holy Spirit

Athanasius' neglect of the Spirit is remedied in his anti-Arian writings, an example being the way in which the famous assertion of *de Incarnatione*, quoted above, linking incarnation and deification, is reformulated in *de Decretis* to read: 'For "the Word became flesh", that he might offer this on behalf of all, and that we, participating in his Spirit, might be capable of deification' (*de Decretis* 14). But it was only towards the end of the 350s that Athanasius addressed the question of the Holy Spirit directly. The creed adopted by the Synod of Nicaea had merely affirmed the existence of the Spirit, and there seems to have been little concern about the nature and status of the Spirit in the ensuing controversy over the adequacy of the dogmatic decision of that synod. The issue was raised by those whom Athanasius calls *Tropici*; that is, those, he argued, who interpreted Scripture allegorically (or 'tropologically') in order to evade the teaching of Scripture on the Holy Spirit. (They were later called Pneumatomachoi, or 'Spirit-fighters', or Macedonians, after Macedonius, archbishop of Constantinople c. 342–60 CE, about whom we know little.) In truth, as St Gregory Nazianzen was to acknowledge, the witness of Scripture to the Holy Spirit is by no means straightforward. The *Tropici* maintained that the Holy Spirit was a creature, one of the 'ministering spirits' mentioned in Hebrews (1:14). In essence, Athanasius' response is to extend the arguments he had already used to establish the divinity of the Son in his anti-Arian writings to the case of the Holy Spirit, whom he called the 'Image of the Son' (*Letter to Serapion* [= *Serap.*] 1. 24). He argues that the Holy Spirit belongs to the uncreated side of the primal divide between the uncreated and the created: he is from God, not *ex nihilo*. His titles – life-giving (*zōopoion*), unction and seal – demonstrate his role in deification, and therefore his uncreated, divine status (*Serap.* 1.23). Athanasius also extends to the Spirit the epithet *homoousion* (*Serap.* 1.27; 3.1).

The apparent neglect of the life of faith in *de Incarnatione* is amply compensated in his formal ascetic writings (cf. Brakke 1995), and in the festal letters sent to his clergy and people each year in preparation for Easter. From these it is clear that for Athanasius the Incarnation invites and demands a response that includes faith and a strenuous attempt to respond to God's offer of grace by fighting against temptation and growing in the virtues.

THE CAPPADOCIAN FATHERS

The Cappadocian Fathers – Basil ('the Great') of Caesarea (modern Kayseri in Turkey), his friend Gregory of Nazianzus ('the Theologian'), and his younger brother Gregory of Nyssa, to whom should be added Macrina, the elder sister of Basil and Gregory, of whose teaching we know through Gregory's devotion to her – built on the achievement of Athanasius, and were instrumental in formulating and defending the Nicene orthodoxy that was made the religious ideology of the Roman empire at the Synod of Constantinople, called by Theodosius in 381. The depth of their admiration for Athanasius can be gauged from Gregory Nazianzen's panegyric 'on the Great Athanasius' (*Oration* 21). They are often called 'Neo-Nicenes', with the implication that what they called Nicene orthodoxy was something other than the doctrine of the synod of 325. Their theology is certainly more developed, both in terms of Trinitarian theology and Christology, but the widespread assumption that they owe more to the so-called 'homoeousian' party, who in the late 350s advanced the belief that the Son was of similar substance (*homoiousios*) to the Father, instead of *homoousios*, needs to be challenged. There are two reasons for this widespread belief: first, Basil's association with homoeousian circles through his (then) friendship with Eustathius of Sebaste (Rousseau 1994: 98–9); second, the conviction that Athanasius' understanding of the *homoousion* is to be interpreted as expressing a doctrine of 'numerical unity of substance', with which the Cappadocian doctrine cannot be reconciled. The latter characterization of Athanasius' doctrine has been refuted conclusively by Professor Stead (Stead 1977: 260–6). The former point runs the risk of attributing guilt by association, but is sometimes supported by appeal to the alleged early correspondence between Basil and the then revered defender of Nicene orthodoxy, Apollinaris of Laodicea (*Epistles* 361–4), in which Basil, as an homoeousian, sought advice from Apollinaris about the meaning of the *homoousion*. But even if the correspondence is genuine (and there is no agreement on this: cf. Fedwick 1981: 6, n. 23), it would seem that Apollinaris convinced Basil, as a genuine letter of Basil's (*Ep.* 9 to Maximus the philosopher), written shortly afterwards, defends an authentically Athanasian understanding of the *homoousion*.

The Cappadocian contribution to theology, in the widest sense, is enormous. They were all committed to the ascetic movement of the fourth century, and Basil, in particular, is a fundamental figure for eastern monasticism, not least through his misleadingly-entitled 'Rules'. The Cappadocian Fathers, not least Macrina, are also important in the history of the Christian incorporation of the values and ideas of classical, Hellenic culture (cf. Pelikan 1993). Gregory Nazianzen was a considerable poet, and Gregory of Nyssa wrote compellingly on the personal transformation that faithful pursuit of the Christian life entails (what is often called 'mysticism'). All of them shared an understanding of the human person as being on the border between uncreated and created being by virtue of being created in the image of God, and exercising a mediatorial role as a kind of little cosmos (*mikros kosmos*), in which the great cosmos of the created order is reflected and contained. But we shall be mainly concerned here with their contribution to the development of the fundamental doctrines of the Trinity and Christology.

The Cappadocians and the unknowability of God

Fundamental to Cappadocian theology is their conviction of the radical unknowability of God. In one of his letters to his friend and fellow-bishop, Amphilochius of Iconium, Basil insists that though God reveals himself through his activities, in his essence he remains unknowable: 'We say that from his activities (*energeiôn*) we know our God, but we do not undertake to approach the essence (*ousia*) itself. For his activities descend to us, but his essence remains unapproachable.' It is precisely this incomprehensibility that inspires our reverence and worship: 'knowledge of the divine essence is the sense of his incomprehensibility; and what inspires our worship is not what the essence is comprehended as being, but that it is at all . . . Therefore, from the activities comes knowledge, and from knowledge worship' (*Ep.* 234). The second of Gregory Nazianzen's 'Theological Orations' (*Or.* 28) is devoted to the subject of God's ineffability. But perhaps the profoundest exploration among the Cappadocians of the unknowability of God is found in Gregory of Nyssa. For him God's unknowability is a consequence of ontological divide between the uncreated Trinity and the created order; because of this divide there is nothing in common between God and creature, and thus God is utterly unknowable to the creature. It follows from this, Gregory argues, that the closer the creature comes to God in himself, the more he is aware of God's incomprehensibility: coming close to God is to enter darkness. As the soul seeks God in himself, 'it goes always towards the more inward, until by the activity of the intellect it arrives at the invisible and the incomprehensible and there it sees God. For the true knowledge and seeing of what we seek consists in this, in not seeing, because that which we seek transcends all knowledge, cut off, as it were, on every side by incomprehensibility, as by a thick cloud' (*de Vita Moysis* [= *Moses*] 2.163). This implies that the soul, in its search for God, is engaged on an endless quest: 'For no limit can be conceived in a boundless nature. And the limitless cannot by nature be understood. But every desire towards the beautiful which draws us on in this ascent is intensified by the very progress towards the beautiful. And this is truly to see God: never to have this desire satisfied' (*Moses* 2.238–9).

Opposition to Anomoeanism

This Cappadocian conviction of the radical unknowability of God was deepened by their engagement with Anomoeanism, the doctrine, promoted especially by Eunomius, who was briefly bishop of Cyzikus in 360, at the height of the power of the radical opponents of Nicaea. According to this doctrine, the Son is unlike the Father. Eunomius' defence of this doctrine, of which only fragments now survive in the refutations principally by Basil and Gregory of Nyssa, was put in terms of considerable philosophical sophistication, and continued to engage the minds of the Cappadocian Fathers, and also of St John Chrysostom,⁷ until the 380s. Part of Eunomius' case, it was alleged, was that the simplicity of God's nature entailed that 'God does not know anything more about his own essence than we do' (cf. Vaggione 1987: 167–73, 179). Against this the Orthodox tirelessly asserted God's ineffability. The earliest of Basil's theological works was directed against Eunomius (Sesboüé

et al. 1982–3). Gregory of Nyssa also composed a reply to Eunomius' defence (written just before Basil's death), and a further reply to Eunomius' response to him (the third and fourth of Gregory Nazianzen's 'Theological Orations', *Or.* 29–30, also attacked Eunomius).

Being and person – *ousia* and *hypostasis*

More important than the details of the Cappadocian response to Eunomius was the terminology Basil formulated, which soon won universal acceptance in the Greek East, for expressing the doctrine of the Trinity. As noted above, the Synod of Alexandria in 362 had accepted that different use of the terminology of *ousia* and *hypostasis* did not necessarily entail different doctrine. Basil's proposal was to agree to use these two words differently, using *ousia* to express the unity of the Godhead, and *hypostasis* to express the distinct members of the Trinity. In two letters written in 375, Basil introduces the distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis*:

Ousia has the same relationship to *hypostasis* as the common (*koinon*) has to the particular (*idion*). For each of us participates in existence by the common term *ousia*, and is such a one by his own properties. So there (*kakei*: in the Godhead) the term *ousia* is common, such as goodness, divinity, or any other notion, while the *hypostasis* is beheld in the property of fatherhood, or of sonship, or of sanctifying power.

(*Ep.* 214)

He insists that *hypostasis* is a better word than *prosôpon*, used by the Sabellians, since *hypostasis* has ontological connotations absent from *prosôpon*. He also comments that western Christians should also accept this, even though their own terminology confuses the terms (since the Latin *substantia*, used to translate *ousia*, is literally equivalent to *hypostasis*): with typical Greek hauteur, he puts this confusion down to the 'poverty of their language'. Basil is often accused of (or credited with) introducing an Aristotelian distinction, but there is nothing more than a general similarity of concept between Basil's distinction and Aristotle's distinction between first and second substance in *Categories* 5. We need to recall Basil's conviction of God's fundamental ineffability: this is an analogy that gives us a glimpse of the nature of the Trinity, not a rigorous distinction from which we can make logical deductions. It is worth noting one reason that Basil advances for making this distinction: 'for unless the mind is free from confusion over the properties of each [of the persons], it will be impossible to complete the doxology to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit' (*Ep.* 210). Such precision is necessary for worship.

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit

Basil

The doxology to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit was at the heart of a controversy that produced from Basil one of his greatest works, his treatise *On the Holy Spirit*.⁸ This was written in the mid-370s, almost twenty years after Athana-

sus' letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit. But despite the later date, it is much less explicit on the nature and status of the Holy Spirit than Athanasius had been: Basil does not call the Spirit God, much less use the term *homoousion*. Central to the controversy was the form of the doxology, whether it should have the form, 'Glory to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit', or, 'Glory to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit' (in *Spirit* 1.3 Basil speaks of this latter form as concluding 'with the Son and with the Holy Spirit'). He insists that both are to be used, because the former makes clear the order of the divine persons in the *oikonomia* of salvation, while the latter ranks the three persons together as equal.

But Basil's reticence in making his doctrine of the Spirit explicit caused something of a scandal among those committed to the orthodoxy for which the Cappadocians were fighting; we learn of this both from one of Gregory Nazianzen's letters (*Ep.* 58) and his panegyric on Basil (*Or.* 43). In both cases Gregory defends his friend by distinguishing between what one can confess in private, and what it is wise to confess in public. This corresponds exactly to a distinction Basil himself makes in the course of *On the Holy Spirit* between *kerygma*, the public teaching of the church, and *dogma*, the deeper meaning of the experience of the life of faith: '*Dogma* is one thing, *kerygma* another; the one is kept silent, while the *kerygmata* are proclaimed publicly' (*Spirit* 27.66). The distinction between *kerygma* and *dogma* corresponds to the distinction between the 'written teaching' and 'what is handed down to us secretly (*en mysteriô(i)*) in the tradition of the apostles'. This latter is no whispered message, but liturgical practices like the sign of the cross, eastward-facing prayer, the Eucharistic invocation; also the 'obscurity that surrounds the Scriptures making the meaning of its doctrines difficult for the profit of its readers' is a 'form of silence'. What Basil perhaps means is that the doctrine of the divinity of the Holy Spirit is not something that can be grasped apart from its being experienced, an experience that takes place primarily in participation in the church's liturgy. At any rate Basil's reticence over explicitly affirming the divinity of the Spirit is reflected in the clause added to the confession of the Holy Spirit in the creed drawn up at the Synod of Constantinople in 381, which restricts itself to ranking the Spirit with the Father and the Son in worship and glorification (Tanner 1990: 24), though the letter of the synod to Pope Damasus, summing up its achievements, is more explicit (Tanner 1990: 28).

Gregory Nazianzen

Basil's reticence was not shared by his friend, Gregory Nazianzen, who asserts clearly in his fifth 'Theological Oration', 'What then? Is the Spirit God? Yes, indeed. Is he *homoousios*? Yes, if he is God' (*Or.* 31.10). But Gregory, too, knows that the divinity of the Holy Spirit is less clear from the Scriptures than that of the Father or the Son, and also agrees with Basil that the real demonstration of the Spirit is found in the life of the church:

The Old Testament proclaimed the Father clearly, and the Son more obscurely.
The New Testament makes clear the Son, and indicates the divinity of the

Spirit. Now the Spirit lives among us, providing us with the clearest revelation of himself.

(*Or.* 31.26)

Gregory advances beyond his friend in other ways. Basil's distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis* as parallel to that between the common and the particular raised the question as to what were the particular features that distinguished Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Basil suggested, as we have seen above, fatherhood, sonship, and sanctifying power (in *Ep.* 236 Basil derives these *idiomata* or *characterai* from the opening words of each clause of the creed). But what kind of particular features are these, and is sanctifying power really distinctive of the Spirit; surely it could be ascribed to Father or Son? Gregory's contribution is first to identify such a particular feature as a relationship (*schesis*): "father" is the name neither of an essence nor of an activity, but of a relationship or manner of being that holds between the father and the son' (*Or.* 29.16). Fatherhood and sonship, then, are to be seen as relationships. What of the Holy Spirit? For Gregory the relationship that identifies the Spirit is that mentioned in John 15:26: procession (*ekporeusis*: *Or.* 31.8). The Son is begotten from the Father; the Spirit proceeds from the Father. In that way Gregory turned the jibe of the pneumatomachians that inclusion of the Spirit within the Godhead would make him either the Son's twin (if the Spirit was derived from the Father) or the Father's grandson (*Or.* 31.7–8). But what these terms, begetting and procession, mean in themselves when used of the Godhead is beyond our comprehension.

The Cappadocians and Messalianism

There is perhaps more to this combination of reticence about the Spirit and a sense of the power of the Spirit's presence than appears on the surface of the historical record. The period of the Cappadocian struggle for Nicene orthodoxy overlapped with the period when we first begin to hear of the so-called 'Messalians', a word derived from the Syriac meaning 'those who pray' (in Greek, *Euchites*).⁹ The Messalians were accused of neglecting the sacramental life of the church, and its hierarchy, and placing all their faith in prayer to the Holy Spirit, who, it was believed, would descend on those who sought him and transform them, granting them that serenity and freedom from temptation that was called *apatheia* in the language of Greek ascetic theology. They were condemned at synods held in Antioch in Syria and Side in Pamphylia in the 380s or 390s, and also at the Third Ecumenical Synod at Ephesus in 431. Despite this official condemnation, they exercised considerable influence in orthodox circles. Their influence is most evident in the collections of homilies ascribed to Macarius of Egypt, which were treasured in orthodox circles, but they also made an impact on the Cappadocian Fathers, at least on the two brothers. Chapter 9 of Basil's *On the Holy Spirit*, a chapter that forms an interlude between the two parts of the treatise and constitutes an encomium on the Holy Spirit in which have been detected echoes of Plotinus, circulated separately as part of the Macarian literature (Haykin 1994: 106), and Gregory of Nyssa's *de Instituto Christiano* is in part dependent on the 'Great Letter' of Macarius (Staats 1968). It may be that Basil, and others, felt pulled in different directions by this enthusiastic

movement: keen to acknowledge the experience of the Spirit, but reluctant to play into the hands of those who appealed to the Spirit against the episcopal hierarchy and the sacraments – precisely the context in which Basil locates the experience of the Spirit.¹⁰

The defining of orthodoxy

The purpose of the Synod of Constantinople held in 381 was to place the seal on the restoration of Nicene orthodoxy. By this time Basil was dead, but the two Gregories played important roles in the synod. Gregory Nazianzen had a significant part, as the pastor of the orthodox congregation at the church of Anastasia, in the preparation for the synod, but the synod was, for him, a political disaster. His appointment as archbishop of Constantinople was opposed on the grounds that it would mean translation from his see of Sasima, the ‘utterly dreadful and cramped little settlement’, where Basil had had him consecrated bishop against his will, and where he had never resided. Deposed, Gregory left for his family estate and his literary activity. For Gregory of Nyssa, on the contrary, the synod marked the beginning of prominence as one of the official spokesmen for imperial orthodoxy. One of his works belonging to this period is his *Catechetical Oration*,¹¹ perhaps the first attempt to present a systematic account of Christian doctrine since Origen’s *On First Principles*. The first four chapters concern the doctrine of God the Trinity, and it is perhaps worth giving an outline here, as this passage was to have a lasting influence on eastern theology, being followed closely in a short work on the Trinity, ascribed to Cyril of Alexandria, which formed the basis for the exposition of the doctrine of God in St John Damascene’s *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*.

Gregory begins by presenting Christian teaching as a middle way between pagan polytheism and Jewish monotheism. He starts by arguing for the existence of a single divine power (*dynamis*), ‘manifest in the [harmony of the cosmos] and transcendent over the all’ (*Cat.* prol.), against the dispersed divinity of paganism. He then goes on to say, against Judaism, that ‘the doctrine of piety is able to see a certain distinction of *hypostasis* in the unity of the [divine] nature’ (*Cat.* 1), and argues for the existence in God of *logos*. His argument is based on the analogy of the human being’s uttering of a word, but whereas everything about the human is transitory, and so our word is passing, ‘the incorruptible and eternally enduring nature has a word that is everlasting and subsistent’ (*Cat.* 1). Briefly he sketches out the qualities of the Logos, that it is free and a power that works unerringly towards the good, for which reason the world, created by the Logos, is good, too. He argues that a *logos* is different from that of which it is the *logos*, and yet this difference is not a matter of nature (*physis*), so that all the properties that we ascribe to God – goodness, power, wisdom, eternity – lead us both to the Father, and to ‘the *logos* that subsists from out of him’ (*Cat.* 1). Chapter 2 argues that just as by analogy we have been able to discern the existence of God’s Logos from the human word, so in the case of the Holy Spirit we can discern ‘certain shadows and likenesses of the ineffable nature in ourselves’. He pursues this by seeing an analogy in the breath (*pneuma*) that gives force to our words (in this probably picking up Basil’s idea of the

spirit as the 'breath of [God's] mouth', developed in *Spirit* 16.38). Chapter 3 sums up this middle way, while stressing the 'inexpressible depth of mystery' that we are venturing into:

The unity of nature survives from the assumptions of the Jews, the distinction into *hypostaseis* from paganism, each being healed mutually by the other from their irreverent opinions. For it is as if the number of the triad is a remedy for those who err concerning the one, while the doctrine of unity is a remedy for those dispersed into multiplicity.

(*Cat.* 3)

Chapter 4 derives all this from Scripture by an exegesis of Ps. 32:6: 'by the word of the Lord were the heavens established, and all their power by the breath of his mouth'.

There are several points worth noting about this exposition. First, it starts from the single divine power manifest in the world that makes clear the unity of God; it is from the unity of God (the Father) that Gregory proceeds to develop the doctrine of the Trinity. Second, although Gregory is clearly aware of his brother's distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis* (indeed, the most elaborate discussion of this distinction, preserved as *Ep.* 38 in Basil's correspondence, is most likely by Gregory of Nyssa himself), he makes use of this distinction in quite an informal way, and (probably because he starts from the divine *dynamis*) uses the term *physis* in preference to *ousia*. And third, the analogy from which he develops his doctrine of the Trinity is drawn from the human being as a whole, soul and body, not from the spiritual side of human nature, as if that were in some way closer to God.

. . . and Heresy

A clear exposition of the faith, in creed and treatise, was clearly an important part of the project of defining imperial orthodoxy. The other side of that project was the categorizing and condemnation of error, which was fulfilled in the work of Epiphanius, bishop of Constantia (ancient Salamis, near modern Famagusta) in Cyprus. In his own life, he was active in the exposing of heresy, not least Origenism, but his main contribution to Theodosius' enterprise of establishing Christian orthodoxy was his *Panarion*, in which he summarized and refuted 80 heresies, from the time of Adam to his own time, providing thereby a kind of genealogy of heresy.

The Cappadocians and Christology

The background to the problem

But clarification about the co-equal divinity of Father, Son and Spirit only rendered more acute the problem of understanding how divinity and humanity could be united in the person of Christ. The theologians of the second and third centuries had tended to suggest that the Godhead perceived in Christ was itself a mediator between the supreme Godhead of the Father and the human condition. Arius had called in question what could be meant by such mediation, if God were creator, and

solved the problem by making the Only-begotten God, manifest in Jesus, the supreme creature. The eventual triumph of Nicene orthodoxy left the Christological problem posed in stark terms: in Christ were united human nature and the divine nature of the Son, co-equal with the Father. Two trends can be seen in the theology of the later fourth century. The first, already clearly stated in Athanasius, held firmly to the full divinity of the Son, and sees in the incarnation the amazing paradox of God living a human life, a paradox that is a measure of God's immeasurable love for humankind. The second trend kept the two natures apart, for fear lest the integrity of either be affected by the presence of the other. (The two tendencies are often called, not altogether satisfactorily, Word-flesh and Word-man – *Logos-sarx* and *Logos-anthrōpos* – Christologies: see especially Grillmeier 1975.) The dangers of the first trend, with its stress on the unity of Christ, for in him God was living a human life, were soon to be manifest.

Apollinarianism

Apollinaris of Laodicea, a friend of Athanasius, who had openly proclaimed his support for him and his theological stance by welcoming him and sharing communion with him on his return from exile in 346, was the first we know of to reveal these dangers. Only fragments of his works remain, but from these it can be argued that Apollinaris, in his reflections on Christ, was simply thinking through the implications of Athanasius' approach to Christology (these parallels are more telling than the fact, often mentioned, that Athanasius never unambiguously asserts that Christ had a human soul). For instance, in *Against the Arians* 3.30, Athanasius asserts that '[The Word] became man, he did not come into a man', and goes on to explain that 'coming into a man' is what happened in the case of the prophets, whereas 'becoming a man' refers to the Incarnation. Three fragments (preserved in Gregory of Nyssa's *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium*) are perhaps reflections on this distinction. They read: 'unless the Lord was enfleshed mind, he was wisdom enlightening a human mind. But this happens in all men. If this were the case, the advent of Christ was not the coming of God, but a human birth'; 'if the Word did not become an enfleshed mind, but wisdom in a mind, the Lord did not come down nor did he empty himself'; 'therefore he was a man; for, according to Paul, a man is a mind in the flesh' (fr. 70–2; fragments taken from Lietzmann 1904). Like Athanasius, Apollinaris is trying to distinguish between inspiration by divine wisdom (as in the prophets) and Incarnation (as in Christ). But unlike Athanasius, whose method is simply to illustrate the differences (e.g., the Word is not said to suffer when a prophet suffers, in contrast to the case of Christ), Apollinaris' method is analytical: if inspiration means the Word or Wisdom illuminating a human mind, then Incarnation must be something different – the Word taking the place of the human mind, which means that he becomes a human being, because (he cites Paul) a human being is a mind in the flesh. This means that the incarnate one is as much a single being as any human being (for which Apollinaris used the fateful phrase *mia physis tou Theou Logou sesarkōmenē*: one incarnate nature of God the Word): the Word is living a human life.

But what kind of a human life, without a human mind? To understand Apol-

linaris here we need to be sensitive to the way he juggles the two ontological divides we have already mentioned: the Platonic divide between the spiritual and the material, and the Christian divide between uncreated and created. For Apollinaris seems to share Athanasius' analysis of creation as well as his approach to Christology: the creature, left to itself, slides away into nothingness. Hence the fall: the frail human mind drifted off into sin, and became subject to the opportunities for sin provided by the flesh. No human mind could reverse that, for it too would be frail and succumb to the flesh. What was needed then was an uncreated mind, that is the Logos himself, who is unchangeable, and could assume flesh and overpower it, and thus restore fallen humankind. The Platonism is revealed in Apollinaris' anthropology: the human is simply a conjunction of spiritual mind (which can be either created or the uncreated Logos) and material body; but this has been radicalized by his understanding of the creature as essentially changeable and frail. There are then two motives in Apollinaris' Athanasian reflections on Christology. First, incarnation is distinct from inspiration: incarnation produces a new nature, God become man. Second, his profound sense of human frailty, including the frailty of the human mind. These two motives are manifest in Apollinaris' switching between a dichotomous and a trichotomous anthropology (in which he is not at all unusual): when he is thinking of the single nature of Christ he tends to use a dichotomous anthropology, with the Logos assuming flesh; when he is thinking of human moral frailty he employs the trichotomous model with the Logos taking the place of the *nous* and being joined to the soul (*psychê*, representing animal life) and body.

The Cappadocian response

Apollinaris' doctrine is neat, but what is the human life that the Logos has assumed in Christ? It was on that point that the two Gregories, especially Gregory Nazianzen, concentrated their attack on Apollinaris. (They attacked him, less fairly, for other beliefs that are misunderstandings of Apollinaris, either by them or by Apollinaris' disciples – for instance the belief that the Word brought his humanity from heaven and did not assume it from the Virgin.) For them both, Apollinaris' Christology was radically deficient because Christ had to assume all human life if he was to redeem it. But the part of man most in need of redemption was the human mind and will, for humans had fallen, according to the biblical narrative, not because they succumbed to the flesh but because they rebelled against God, or crossed wills with him: the fundamental sin that had brought about the fall was pride, setting oneself up in defiance of God. As Gregory Nazianzen memorably put it: 'For the unassumed is the unhealed; that which is united to God is saved' (*Ep.* 101.32). But as the second part of that sentence (often forgotten) reveals, Gregory remained committed to the Athanasian approach to Christology: the Word assumes everything human to live a human life, and thereby to redeem and indeed to deify humankind. Elsewhere in the letters devoted to the Apollinarian heresy (*Epp.* 101, 102, 201), and also in his sermons, especially the third 'Theological Oration' (*Or.* 29.17–21), Gregory tackles the problem of how the Word, fully divine in himself, can assume humanity, lacking in nothing. Two principles emerge. First, there is one subject in Christ, and that subject is the Logos, everything done by Christ or suffered by him is to be ascribed

to the Logos; second, this produces a paradoxical union of God and humanity, and to enter into that paradox is to begin to realize the meaning of the Incarnation: 'As a lamb he is dumb; but he is word, proclaimed by a voice crying in the desert. He is frail, wounded; but he heals every sickness, and every frailty. He is brought to the cross, and crucified; but he restores us by the tree of life' (*Or.* 29. 20).

THE CHRISTOLOGICAL CONTROVERSY

The Antiochene school

Apollinarianism marked the beginning of the Christological controversy sparked off by the ascription of uncompromising divinity to Christ by Nicene orthodoxy. The next stage was sparked off by the reaction to Apollinaris, less measured than that of the Cappadocian Fathers, by a group of Christian thinkers associated with the metropolis of the diocese of the East (*Oriens*), Antioch. The central figure, about whom, alas, we know less than we would like, was Diodore (d. c. 390), who had a kind of Christian school in Antioch, where he instructed his pupils in both scriptural exegesis and theology and the principles and practice of Christian asceticism. He later became bishop of Tarsus. Among his pupils in Antioch were numbered Theodore, who later became bishop of Mopsuestia (d. 428), and probably John Chrysostom, who later, fatefully, became archbishop of Constantinople (d. 407). Later representatives of this group of Christian thinkers include Nestorius (d. c. 451), later archbishop of Constantinople, who was probably a pupil of Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Theodoret (c. 390–c. 460), a later product of the ascetical schools in Antioch, who became bishop of Cyrrhus, and, as well as a theologian and church historian, was a historian of Syrian asceticism.

Characteristics of the Antiochenes

This group is marked by a number of features. First, there is the commitment to Christian asceticism, which, however, did not lead them to a withdrawn form of monasticism (at least, not permanently), but rather led them to pastoral (and eventually episcopal) activity, through which they pressed the demands of asceticism on ordinary Christians. Second, in apparent contrast to the ascetic commitment, there is their attention to, and skill in, rhetorical ability: both John and Theodore were pupils of the great pagan rhetor, Libanius; John and Nestorius were summoned to the episcopal throne of Constantinople because of their fame as preachers; and Diodore attracted the attention of the emperor Julian for the rhetorical skill with which he attacked the ancient gods.¹² Third, and representing the convergence of their ascetical commitment and their rhetorical training, there is their distinctive approach to scriptural interpretation, marked by concern to establish the literal meaning of the text, and to draw from it a predominantly moral and ascetical message (cf. Young 1997). John Chrysostom engaged in such biblical exegesis almost entirely through sermons; Theodore and Theodoret produced continuous commentaries and treatises (*zêtēmata*) discussing difficult passages in biblical books;

Theodore's skill was such that he was known as 'the Interpreter'. All of them, however, suffered condemnation for crossing the archbishops of Alexandria, Theophilus and his nephew and successor Cyril. John, whose offence was primarily political, was posthumously reinstated; but Nestorius, Theodore and Theodoret were condemned at Ecumenical Synods – Nestorius at Ephesus (431) and Theodore and Theodoret at Constantinople II (553) – with the result that their works have survived in a fragmentary form, preserved by churches that did not acknowledge the authority of these councils. The works of Diodore, who was linked with Theodore by Cyril as a precursor of Nestorius, have suffered the same fate.

Because of the imperfect transmission of their works, there are serious gaps in our understanding of their theology. The abundant (indeed over-abundant) survival of Chrysostom's works do little to fill this lacuna, as Chrysostom seems untypical of Antioch in his approach to Christology, which provided the grounds for the condemnation of his fellow-Antiochenes, though he shares their lukewarm attitude to the Virgin Mary. It is perhaps the case (though the lack of evidence makes it difficult to be certain) that Christology, as it was understood by the Cappadocians and Cyril, was not in fact at the centre of Antiochene theology.

Christology and exegesis

The Antiochene approach to the nature of Christ seems to have been directly influenced by their approach to scriptural exegesis. An important question posed by their exegetical approach concerned identifying the person – as in 'dramatis personae' – or character (*prosôpon*) speaking of acting in the text. This led to their distinguishing between the 'person' of the man and the 'person' of the Word in the Gospel narratives: the person of the man performed all the human-befitting actions of Christ (being born, eating, walking, being tired, suffering pain, anguish and death), the person of the Word performed those actions characteristic of the Godhead (miracles, supernatural insight into people and circumstances). Their exegesis, therefore, led them directly to embrace the second tendency in post-Nicene Christology mentioned earlier, the tendency to keep the Godhead and manhood apart, to keep them in their distinctness and integrity (the so-called Word–man Christology). This was enhanced by the moral thrust of their exegesis, and indeed the moral dimension of their whole understanding of the cosmological role of humanity. Christ's humanity is appreciated for its function in providing an example of morally perfect humanity: this moral emphasis demands the full integrity of his humanity.

Theodore of Mopsuestia

To see this in more detail it will be helpful to look more closely at the one who was perhaps the most penetrating theologian among the Antiochenes, Theodore of Mopsuestia.¹³ Central to Theodore's theology is his doctrine of the Two Ages: the present age and the age to come. His understanding of the present age is very like Athanasius' understanding of the human fallen state: beings created out of nothing are sliding back into non-existence, and their state is characterized by corruption and death. But whereas Athanasius gives this a fundamentally ontological interpretation,

Theodore's reading of this is primarily moral: corruption is the negative side of the creature's fundamentally changeable state, which makes it impossible for the human creature in this present age to live a life in conformity to the will of God, which is marked by unchangeability. The age to come represents the reverse of the frailty and changeability of the present age: it is characterized by unshakeable, serene conformity to the will of God. Athanasius and Theodore also differ in their understanding of how God has remedied the fallen human condition of the present age. Whereas Athanasius sees this present world transformed by the presence of the Incarnate Word, a transformation manifest in the achievement by Christians of virginity and martyrdom and their defeat of the demons (*Inc.* 27–31, 48–55), Theodore seems to look rather to the establishment of a Christian hope that, when this present age is swept away, the age to come will be manifest. And Theodore sees that hope established in the existence within this present age of the life of the age to come in the person of Christ: in the person of Christ we see, amid the corruption and changeability of the present age, the living out of a life of perfect conformity to the will of the Father. This life was a perfect human life; it is necessary then that Christ had a complete humanity – hence the fierce opposition of the Antiochenes to any hint of Apollinarianism. It is the resurrection that sets the seal on this life, and demonstrates that this life has destroyed the corruption and death of the present age, and opened up the way to the age to come. Henceforth, Christians, believing in Christ, while they still live in this present age marked by corruption and death, 'receive in hope communion with him and this life to come'.¹⁴

The Christological question for Theodore is simply: how was it possible for Christ to live in this present age the life of the age to come? And his answer is that the Word dwelt in the man Jesus so completely that he was able to resist the corrupting influence of the present age. But it was an indwelling by grace, even though more complete (both in intensity and duration: from his very conception) than with other human beings. Theodore spoke of an indwelling 'by [God's] good pleasure' (*kat' eudokian*), 'as in a son' (*bôs en huiô(i)*). As a result of the Word's exceptional indwelling in Christ, there appeared to be two 'persons' (*prosôpa*), as in the Gospel accounts, but also, as the Gospel account makes clear, these two *prosôpa* were in complete harmony – the grace of the Word was present in the actions of the humanity – so that one could speak of one *prosôpon*, the *prosôpon* of the union, as his disciple Nestorius will call it. But this one *prosôpon* is a result of the union, not its presupposition, as with Athanasius and his followers. It is the coming together of the 'Word who assumes' and the 'humanity assumed': and that coming together is a mutual coming together, a union of two perfect subjects, divine and human.

Nestorius and the beginnings of the conflict

Theodore died in the communion of the church, but that same year (428) Nestorius was elected archbishop of Constantinople. He arrived full of reforming zeal, promising the emperor heaven in return for an earth purged of heretics, and set about persecuting heretical Christians – Arians, Macedonians, and others – though prevented by the Emperor when he turned to the Novatianist congregations. But he soon found himself embroiled in charges of heresy. One of the priests he had brought

with him from Antioch, Anastasius, preached against the use of the title *Theotokos* ('one who gave birth to God', Mother of God) of the Virgin Mary. Devotion to the Mother of God had grown throughout the fourth century; this is presumably not unconnected with the development during that century of the feast of the Nativity of Christ, which provided a focus in the Christian Year additional to the Resurrection, and one in which the Virgin Mary had an inalienable role as *Theotokos*. Word of Nestorius' opposition to the use of *Theotokos* came to the ear of Cyril, pope of Alexandria, who saw this as an ideal opportunity to clip the wings of the upstart see of Constantinople (granted status after Rome and before Alexandria by the Synod of Constantinople in 381). For the title *Theotokos* was central to the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria.

Cyril of Alexandria: the seal of the Fathers

It is difficult to overestimate the importance for Greek theology of Cyril of Alexandria (c. 380–444), who by the seventh century had been dubbed the 'seal of the Fathers'. The heart of his theology is Christ: Cyril has been claimed as 'the only theologian of genius there has ever been of whom it is true to say, almost with metaphor, that his theology is "Christocentric"' (Wickham 1983: xxxiv). It was the failure of the Synod of Chalcedon in 451 to convince the East that it had not betrayed Cyril that led to schisms that still endure. Cyril's understanding of Christ is essentially that of Athanasius, shorn of the danger of Apollinarianism; Cyril always insists that the flesh that the Word became, according to John 1:14, was 'flesh ensouled with a rational soul'.¹⁵ But the Word made flesh was, as Athanasius had understood, God living a human life, and the sole subject of the Incarnate life was the Word, something Cyril likes to demonstrate from the creed of the Nicene synod of 325. As such, the Incarnate one was a unity, a single nature: 'one incarnate nature of God the Word' (*mia physis tou Theou Logou sesarkômenê*), to use the phrase he later became fond of, which he thought Athanasian, but which was, alas, from Apollinaris. Because of the unity of the Incarnate one, it was proper to acknowledge 'God's Word as having suffered in the flesh, been crucified in the flesh, tasted death in flesh and been made first-born from the dead',¹⁶ as Cyril put it in the twelfth anathematism he insisted that Nestorius affirm, although in himself, in his own being, the Word of God is immune to suffering. It followed equally that Mary was *Theotokos* (first anathematism), and that the Gospel narrative is not to be interpreted of two subjects (fourth anathematism). Nestorius refused to accept these and other stipulations, and, outflanked by Cyril's superior political acumen, was condemned at the Synod of Ephesus in 431 (the third Ecumenical Synod). After the synod, Cyril came to an agreement with the bishops of the diocese of the *Oriens*, led by John of Antioch, who accepted the condemnation of Nestorius. According to this agreement, the 'Formula of Union' (Tanner 1990: 69–70), the unity of Christ was affirmed, with the entailment that Mary is indeed the Mother of God, *Theotokos*, but the natures thus united were affirmed as being perfect, one *homoousios* with the Father, the other *homoousios* with us, and it was further agreed that both ways of interpreting the Gospel narratives – that which referred the actions of Christ to a single *prosôpon*, and that which distinguished between two natures – were acceptable.

With Cyril, we find ourselves at a cusp in the development of the theology of the Greek East: in him many of the insights of his predecessors find their culminating expression, but his theological vision was of such power and profundity that it represents the beginning of a further stage in the formation of the theological tradition of the Byzantine East.

NOTES

- 1 Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae (History)* 15.7.7; 21.16.18: Hamilton (1986: 80, 232).
- 2 On Arius and the controversy he aroused, see Williams (1987).
- 3 Williamson (1989: xxxiii), referring to Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 10.4.
- 4 Arius, *Epistula ad Alexandrum Alexandrinum* 3 (Opitz 1934: 12).
- 5 Eusebius of Caesarea, *Epistula ad ecclesiam Caesariensem* 7 (Opitz 1934: 43–4).
- 6 See Thomson (1971). *Contra Gentes* is abbreviated as CG, and *de Incarnatione* as Inc.
- 7 See especially John Chrysostom, *de Incomprehensibili Dei natura homiliae* 1–5 (Malingrey 1970).
- 8 See Pruche 1968. *De Spiritu Sancto* is abbreviated as *Spirit*.
- 9 On the early history of the Messalians, see Stewart (1991).
- 10 From a somewhat different perspective, see Staats (1979).
- 11 Srawley (1903). *Catechetical Oration* is abbreviated as *Cat*.
- 12 Julian, *Ep.* 55 (Wright 1923: 188).
- 13 For this interpretation of Theodore, see Norris (1963), especially pp. 125–262.
- 14 Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Homily* 6.12 (Tonneau 1949: 153).
- 15 Cyril, *Ep.* 2 *ad Nestorium* 3 (Wickham 1983: 4).
- 16 Cyril, *Ep.* 3 *ad Nestorium* 12 (Wickham 1983: 33).

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LATER THEOLOGICIANS OF THE WEST



Ivor Davidson

WESTERN THEOLOGY FROM 312–430 IN CONTEXT

The period between Constantine's adoption of Christianity in 312–13 and the death of Augustine in 430 has traditionally been hailed as the Golden Age of Latin patristic literature (Campenhausen 1964; Rusch 1977; Quasten 1986; Dekkers 1995). First impressions may suggest that this is an exaggeration, or at least an error of chronology. If we measure the intellectual importance of the era by the number of major authors producing seminal works, we might conclude that a time of real productivity did not begin until the 350s, and that it was only in the last quarter of the fourth century that the western church developed an output in any sense comparable to that of its Greek counterpart. From Tertullian onwards, the articulation of a Latin apologetic had been pioneered by the erudite zealots of North Africa; one of this tradition's distant sons, the eminent court-teacher Lactantius, had been able to celebrate the dawning of the Constantinian age and the providential triumph of a faith so recently persecuted, but Lactantius by then was approaching his latter years, and no western intellectual of his succeeding generation appeared to make any effort to supplement his moralizing marketing strategies with a serious exposition of the core doctrines which underpinned the Christians' values. A distinct Latin theology blessed with either depth or breadth had, it seemed, yet to materialize. Even when such a theology did come to birth, it never equalled the accomplishments of the Greek tradition in either quantity or, with the clear exception of Augustine's work, quality. Should the 'Golden Age' designation therefore be abandoned?

Intellectual capital needs to be assessed by subtler mechanisms, however, than by merely counting up literary texts and comparing them with contemporary trends elsewhere. The legacy of this period does consist supremely in the achievements of the writers who are concentrated in its second half, above all the galaxy of Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine who between them made outstanding contributions to many or most of the branches of what we might today designate biblical exegesis and dogmatic theology (they themselves would have been puzzled by our distinction of the two), and who laid doctrinal foundations which, for good or ill, have affected western Christianity ever since. But the importance of the era is also to be traced in

the issues about which these writers thought, and those issues had in most cases been germinating over some considerable time. The later West's story does not begin at mid-century, but in a process of intellectual consolidation which was set in motion by the so-called Constantinian revolution itself.

To appreciate that process, we need to grasp the impact of the changes in the social environment within which western Christians had already started to operate by the teens, twenties, and thirties of the fourth century. Over a relatively short period, believers had gone from being targets for persecution to being beneficiaries of imperial patronage, and the clergy had become favoured with the kind of fiscal privileges and exemptions from curial service traditionally reserved for pagan priests and other select groups. Now the outworking of that change of status over the ensuing generations never was half so smooth as the assured accounts of some of the chroniclers of Christianity have implied. There was no wholesale cultural metamorphosis. The ongoing tensions between 'paganism' and the church can be discerned not just at obvious flash-points, such as the short-lived attempt by Julian to reinstate some of the symbolism of the old order in the early 360s, but in a host of less conspicuous yet none the less revealing social and political developments as well (Momigliano 1963). The Christianizing of empire was plagued by the considerable theological differences that existed within the Christian communities themselves; by the shifting calculations of their political patrons; and by the ability of non-Christian power groups to play upon the fragilities of imperial alignments with particular doctrinal causes in the interests of their own strategies. The status of Christianity as official religion brought its own problems, not least over what to do when schisms erupted in local contexts and rival claims were adduced for imperial favours. Despite a series of anti-pagan measures by Constantius II in the 350s, the religions of the classical world remained officially tolerated for most of the century, only being declared obsolete *superstitiones* in the later years of Theodosius' reign (379–95), when the label *paganī* at last symbolized a definitive second-class status for those who remained loyal to the traditions of polytheism. Despite all the caveats, however, the developments of the later century were organically linked to a process which began with Constantine. Long before the 350s, urban Christian communities were growing used to being the recipients of state largesse, and to expressing their new-found prestige and wealth by erecting elaborate church complexes in strategic locations. Already, bishops were beginning to position themselves for their future status as the new class of civil administrators and urban leaders, getting involved at various levels in regional judicial and financial affairs, and emerging as the public overseers of clerical hierarchies charged not only with the cure of souls but with the promotion of a certain social order (Hobbs and Wuellner 1980). Such men were no longer to be dismissed as zealous *parvenus*: in Italy at least, the church's figureheads were coming increasingly from privileged backgrounds, where they had been educated to the highest standards; it was easy for them to see themselves as the custodians of a new elite. Constantine himself may never have anticipated many of the longer-term implications of the vast paradigm-shift for which he was ultimately responsible, and whether he is regarded in the light of them as hero, villain, or something in between is, in one sense, almost beside the point. What mattered was that the social world in which western Christianity existed was launched on a course

of profound change from 312–13 onwards. Inevitably, the intellectual contours of the faith were being altered along with it (Pelikan 1987: 15–28; Brown 1996: 34–53).

As external pressures on the Christian communities had eased, so the quest to attain theological and structural unity internally had intensified. The ideal of a unified empire was to be facilitated and reinforced by the ideal of a unified Catholic church, embracing all believers everywhere who were subject to the rule of faith. The impetus towards ecumenical oneness is of course most evident in the great creeds and councils. It is no accident that the critical phase in the West's development loosely parallels the period between the Council of Nicaea in 325 and the Council of Chalcedon in 451, and the politically driven aspiration to fashion benchmark statements that would differentiate the normative from the unacceptable at a confessional level and thus define the parameters of the imperial church's constituency. Latin-speaking Christianity may for a generation after Nicaea have lacked the doctrinal acuity to rival the literary achievements of its eastern neighbour, but it already shared implicitly in the same socio-cultural assurance, and it already recognized the value of articulating its gospel in the same grand-scale political terms. Latin culture had always been indebted to the Hellenistic world, and it was entirely natural that the florescence of Greek theology represented by Athanasius, the Cappadocians, and the great exegetes of Alexandria and Antioch would influence later western thinking, evoking a plethora of Latin translations of Greek texts and a steady assimilation of eastern ideas into vernacular preaching. But even before these direct connections came to be so prominent, western clergy could appreciate that the future of their gospel was bound closely to the integrity of the imperial dream, and the defence of a notional common tradition (Cameron 1991). The church's own understandings of ecumenicity were driven, even subsumed, by the exigencies of a cultural ideal (Louth 1996: 14–15).

Yet the fourth- and early fifth-century West was in fact anything but an obvious time for calm reflection. On the political stage, the age which began with the promotion of Christianity to privileged status ended with the crumbling of the military boundaries which had served to delimit the territory of truth, and the realization that the ideal of a common destiny for East and West was and always had been a chimera. At both ends of the time-line, the consequences for the church were considerable: without the Constantinian revolution, Donatism would never have become the force that it was; without the fall of Rome, the beliefs of Pelagius and his followers would never have assumed the significance that they did. On the theological stage, the western church was riven by a whole series of doctrinal problems throughout our period, not just the *causes célèbres* like Arianism, or the tensions evoked by conflicting visions of the ascetic ideal, seen most notably, perhaps, in the controversies surrounding the ideas of Priscillian of Avila in the 370s and 380s (Chadwick 1976; Burrus 1995), but the much-wider-reaching intellectual challenges posed by the popularity of systems such as Manichaeism (Brown 1972: 94–118; Lieu 1985), or the pull of neo-Platonist philosophies, which came to represent the main alternative to Christianity for much of the intelligentsia (Armstrong 1970; Wallis 1995). For all the punching-power of Rome and its bishops, and for all the theological rhetoric, diversity, not unity, characterized the West: the dream of

straightforward doctrinal unification was elusive. In the eastern empire, the centralization of political authority in Constantinople produced a steady imperial control of ecclesiastical affairs; in the West, the papacy secured a position of greater influence, yet in theological terms its significance for much of this period was primarily symbolic: popes like Damasus (366–84) and Siricius (384–99) proudly epitomized and promoted independent western traditions, liturgical, ascetic, and moral, but their actual control over ecclesiastical events beyond their immediate context was often less secure than we might suppose. One of the most striking features of the Golden Age is the extent to which the formulation of Latin Christianity was affected by the considerably different visions of the church and its salvation that prevailed in North Africa, Italy and Gaul. The ultimate triumph of what we think of as western ‘orthodoxy’ was a highly messy process, deeply affected by the ebb and flow of political and military developments and the ability of competing ecclesiastical power-brokers to muster support for their particular doctrinal shibboleths (Frend 1985a). The story of it all is perforce written by the victors, whose vision of a realized Catholicity and consensus inevitably manages to smooth away the bumps in the prehistory of their theme; it is important to recognize that the success of the protagonists was not achieved by a series of easy strokes, or by the naked power of argument alone (Lim 1995). Nevertheless, the very problems which beset the quest for oneness evoked serious intellectual endeavour in themselves: fewer wrangles, fewer theological milestones.

The complexities of the later imperial world have been remarkably opened up to us in modern times. Historical scholarship has learned to deploy not only the traditional tools of literary and archaeological research but models of enquiry deriving from the social sciences to uncover more and more of the milieu in which the Christians of late western antiquity lived, worked, and witnessed. We now appreciate that the ostensibly monolithic structures of church and state were far more stratified than previous generations tended to believe, and that the relationship of churchmen to the machinery of state patronage was a delicate and precarious business (e.g. Jones 1964; Brown 1971; Matthews 1975, 1989; MacMullen 1984; Garnsey and Saller 1987; Alföldy 1988; Cameron 1993). However privileged the upper echelons of the ecclesiastical hierarchy may have become, they had to struggle to define the identity of their communities over against the independent prestige represented by the traditions of their pagan social contexts (Peter Brown 1992: 71–158). It was all too easy to get the balance wrong between milking the rich opportunities afforded by political beneficence and falling prey to the vested interests of secular authorities. Christian leaders were caught between the competing imperatives of an ideal of other-worldliness and the incentives to extend and sustain their churches’ profile in a system that offered rich rewards for services rendered to the cause of social and political cohesion. In the process, they learned to exploit local pride and prejudices in order to develop power-bases of their own, each in its own way self-contained and self-assured, for all the professions of conciliarity and the ostensible ties of spiritual *amicitia* that bound it to other sees. Within certain parameters of loyalty and deference to metropolitan authority, each bishop could cultivate his own particular manifestation of the *ecclesia Catholica*, defined by his abilities to present himself as the benefactor, counsellor, and figurehead of his community.

These provincial fiefdoms were especially important in the West, where in the wake of Rome's collapse in the fifth century they would contribute to the emergence of a new world order in which regional societies could aspire to their own kind of pragmatic stability independent of an overarching military and fiscal system.

Here, then, is the world of the late West – a scene remarkably different for Christianity from any which had preceded it, yet one that was more complex and ambivalent than we might once have supposed. An understanding of this socio-cultural context is vital to our evaluation of the intellectual heritage bequeathed by the church's great thinkers. Like so much Christian thought before and since, most of the ideas with which we deal in this period took shape in the white heat of controversy, and amidst personal, political, and ecclesiastical alliances that were often characterized by significant tension and distrust. But it was in the convergence of these specific factors that they assumed the form that they did, and without the contingencies of personalities and politics the legacy of this 'Golden Age' would have no ultimate meaning.

THE DONATISTS

The Donatist controversy, so-called after the election of Donatus as rival bishop to Caecilian of Carthage in 313, was the most famous issue of ecclesiastical discipline in the early church, and it led to an attempt to grapple with questions of Christian identity at a deeper level than ever before in the West (Frend 1985b). Since Chapter 37 of this volume is devoted to Donatism, in this section I will offer only a general outline.

The roots of the controversy lay in the rigorist view of salvation which had emerged in Roman North Africa from the second century. There the true church had come to be perceived as an essentially separatist movement, the community of God's elect, pure and holy, constituted by baptism a Spirit-led people. This puritanism had been intensified in the Decian persecution, when the revered martyr-bishop Cyprian of Carthage had insisted (in *De lapsis* in 251 CE) that baptism could be administered only by clerics who belonged to the faithful, confessing church. Bishops who had compromised in times of trouble could not, it was felt, offer effective prayers of baptism or ordination, for they had forfeited their possession of the gift of the Spirit, and Christians who had lapsed from the faith required to be rebaptized if they were to be re-admitted to the Catholic community. The idea had been fostered that the real church was always under threat from a spurious imitator, whose officials and ceremonies had no divine sanction.

The Numidian clergy in particular, from the rural areas of modern-day eastern Algeria, were heirs to this tradition. They saw themselves as the upholders of a Christianity that remained qualitatively distinct. They refused to countenance the validity of Caecilian's election as bishop in 311 because one of his consecrators, Felix of Aptungi, was rumoured (unfairly, as it turned out) to have been a *traditor*, or one who had 'handed over' his Scriptures to be burned during the Great Persecution under Diocletian in 303–5. They elected an alternative candidate, one Majorinus, in his place, and he in turn was shortly succeeded by Donatus. Caecilian held

out against his challengers, arguing that many of the Numidians themselves had been collaborators, and that the Catholic church, particularly in the light of Constantine's conversion, could respectably embrace a range of former sinners within its ranks.

According to the standard disputes procedures of empire, Donatus' party appealed to the emperor (Millar 1977: 584–90). To Constantine, the affair seemed like a distant, parochial quarrel over personalities; guided, evidently, by Miltiades, bishop of Rome, he took Caecilian's part from the outset. An imperial commission in 313 decided against Donatus, and an ecclesiastical council at Arles in 314 exonerated Felix of the charge of having been a *traditor*. Caecilian was formally endorsed as rightful bishop of Carthage in November 316. Initially, the Donatists had argued that they were contending simply for the purity of the church and the exclusivity of its sacraments, but they soon formed into a separate group which, they insisted, now represented the true *populus Dei* in North Africa.

The Donatist schism spread rapidly, fuelled by Donatus' charismatic personality and by the plausibility of his supporters' claims to represent the real traditions of the African church. In its origins, it was not a protest movement of a political kind, as can be seen from the Donatists' willingness to appeal to the emperor, nor is it to be characterized as fundamentally an indigenous rural force at odds with an urban Romanized Catholicism (Brown 1972: 279–300, *pace* Frend 1985b). It did come to be seen as politically subversive, none the less. Associations with the *circumcelliones* (marauding Berber bands who based themselves around martyrs' *cellae* or shrines) from the 340s intensified the belief among certain Donatist elements that they had been given a quasi-military calling to employ violent means to overthrow corrupt social structures; the prospect of martyrdom only heightened the glory of their mission (Frend 1969). Such behaviour embarrassed Donatist sympathizers of a less radical bent, of whom there were many. Though actively repressed by the imperial powers at various stages in the fourth century, the movement achieved a massive dominance of its territory. Archaeology has uncovered the physical evidence: vast basilica complexes were erected in key Numidian towns such as Timgad and Bagai, which became Donatist 'holy cities', and countless smaller churches sprang up all over the Numidian countryside as individual villages eagerly symbolized their devotion to a religious ideal that enshrined their sense of being a chosen people (Frend 1985b: 48–59). Donatus' successor, Parmenian, consolidated these communities, forging them into the effective established church. In the 370s and 380s Tyconius, a gifted lay-exegete whose *Liber Regularum* (Babcock 1989) constituted the first Latin study on hermeneutics (even his resolute opponent, Augustine, appreciated it greatly), sought to distance the movement from some of its extremist tendencies by conceding that the true church did include good and bad elements, but the claim remained that, as far as North Africa was concerned, the church of Donatus was that authentic body.

When Augustine became bishop of Hippo in 395 he inherited a community deeply divided between a powerful Donatist party and a resentful Catholic one. Some significant theological polemic against the Donatists had been adduced 25 years previously by Optatus of Milevis, but Augustine advanced the intellectual level of the debate in a series of treatises and epistles (Willis 1950; Quasten 1986:

383–6). Partly at his initiative a series of civil laws were passed outlawing the Donatist cause. Finally, in May of 411, he succeeded in forcing his opponents into an open conference at Carthage, as a result of which Donatism was formally outlawed by an imperial commission. Even then it did not die fast: though seriously weakened, it persisted until after the Arab conquest in the eighth century.

The story of Donatism's course can be followed up elsewhere (see Chapter 37). It is easy to sense how powerful its appeal would have been to a people who had not only been nurtured on implicitly separatist ideals but had also in many cases known economic poverty and political disaffection. It is equally easy to trace parallels in the European Reformation or in British and North American Nonconformism. But the movement's lasting significance lies not so much in the compound of cultural and political concerns by which it was fed as in the theological arguments it engendered. Donatism produced the first serious efforts in the West to address the complex relationships between the nature of the church, Catholicity, baptism, and the validity of clerical office.

What was the true church? Was it, as the Donatists maintained, an absolutely pure body; or was it, as Augustine argued, an inevitable mixture, not just sociologically but morally as well? The Donatist appeal to Cyprian's stern line on apostasy could be matched by an appeal to another important element of Cyprian's teaching – that repentance by a schismatic restores to grace. To Augustine, Jesus' parables implied that the church embraced both the wheat and the tares, both the good fish and the bad, and only God had the right and the ability ultimately to separate them. Human attempts to differentiate would lead only to schism, which was a far worse sin than the *traditio* so abhorred by the Donatists. In this world, the dividing line between the core of true believers and the husk of false professors must remain invisible. That meant that there was always the potential for the church to become co-extensive with its social world, both for good (as in the emerging unity of empire and in missionary expansion) and for ill (as in the dangers of moral and doctrinal corruption). The mystery of Catholicity, Augustine argued, was located within this tensile reality. The holiness of the church consisted not in its members but in the holiness of the Christ whose body it is.

Again: what made baptism valid? Was it the spiritual condition of the officiating cleric, or was it the command of Christ? Wherein lay the authority of ordination? Was it in the moral spotlessness of the priest, or in the divine commission to ordain? The Donatists contended that baptism had to be performed by a 'pure' representative of a 'perfect' church; Augustine insisted that the validity of a sacrament rested not upon the merits of the individual who administered it but upon the merits of the Christ who instituted it in the first place. His logic abandoned the austere side of Cyprian's reasoning. It was an explicit affirmation of what would later be called the *ex opere operato* understanding of sacramental efficacy, which became the consensus western position.

Augustine's defence of the legitimacy of exploiting state authority to coerce his Donatist opponents into submission lent a theological weight to later campaigns to persecute minority voices within the church, and appeal was made to his example by some of European church history's darker tacticians (Brown 1972: 260–78). Primarily, however, Donatism had served as a catalyst for the discussion of ecclesiological

and sacramental themes, and raised issues which have remained at the heart of western debates in these areas ever since.

THE ARIAN CONTROVERSY

The theological controversy which dominated the fourth century was Arianism. Modern scholarship has alerted us to the reality that 'Arianism' as we have traditionally thought of it was not the belief of Arius himself, and there is cause to rethink many of the conventional ways of categorizing the various Arian theologies which arose in the course of the fourth century after Nicaea (Gregg 1985; Williams 1987; Barnes and Williams 1993; and Chapter 38 of this volume). Arius' own theology was concerned to demonstrate from Scripture, tradition, and reason that there is one God, alone unbegotten, transcendent, and unchanging; Jesus, the unique word or wisdom of God, the agent of creation, is 'divine', yet not God as God the Father is God: his divinity is secondary and derivative. Arius wished to point up the soteriological relevance of Jesus to faith: God the Son performs an exemplary function as trail-blazer and model for all who would become the sons and daughters of God by following in his steps (Gregg and Groh 1981). Nicaea's *homoousios*, the insistence that the Son is (in later Athanasian construal of the term) 'of the same substance' with the Father, was initially highly ambiguous, and did not become the non-negotiable watchword of an 'orthodox' party in the East until a generation after its original ratification. The theological issues at stake in the debate were and are crucial for Christian faith, but the idea of a monolithic Arianism opposed by an equally homogeneous orthodoxy is a rhetorical creation that originates with Athanasius; it cannot be substantiated historically.

The enduring myth that the Arian disputes were primarily an eastern affair and never had the same impact in the Latin-speaking West also testifies to the skill with which the opponents of Arian theologies managed to control the course of subsequent historiography. Athanasius' periods of exile enabled him to amass considerable support in the West, and the western Nicenes backed him formally at the Council of Sardica in 343. They enjoyed the protection of Constans until 350. But the sole rulership of Constantius II in the 350s brought renewed patronage for Arian ideas, and a reversal of official western assessments of Athanasius; a number of pro-Nicene western bishops were removed from their sees. The upshot was the notorious creed of Sirmium in 357, a version of which was endorsed, after imperial pressure, by a majority of westerners at Ariminum (Rimini) in 359 (as it was at Seleucia in the East): in Jerome's famous words, 'The whole world groaned and marvelled to find itself Arian' (*Dialogue against the Luciferians* 19). The West had signed up to a 'homoian' doctrine, that God the Son is *like* (*homoios*) God the Father, not consubstantial with him. Exiled bishops were permitted to return to their sees during the renaissance of paganism under Julian, as part of a bid to play off Nicene and Arian against each other in order to weaken Christianity *en bloc*. Life continued to be easier for western Nicenes under Valentinian I, who (unlike his brother Valens, who deliberately promoted Arian interests in the East) aspired to maintain his personal piety free from open doctrinal affiliations; nevertheless, homoian clergy remained

dominant in significant sees. The young Gratian was manoeuvred into a Nicene position in the end, though not before some vacillation. His co-regent and successor, the boy-emperor Valentinian II, heavily encouraged by his mother Justina, Valentinian I's widow, actively advanced the homoians' cause. A definitive political end to homoian prospects in the West was not achieved until Theodosius, and even then it was partly bound up with the political uncertainty of the times and the ability of pro-Nicene leaders, above all (as I set out in Chapter 47) Ambrose, to force their opponents' hand and to blend doctrinal arguments with appeals to baser prejudices by implying that the homoians stood for the same barbarian beliefs as the Gothic invaders who had by then seriously destabilized the western empire.

In reality, then, Arianism of a kind constituted a mainstream position within western Christianity for much of the fourth century (Meslin 1967). Until the 350s, most churchmen in the West had a poor understanding of the issues over which the easterners were wrangling. Nevertheless, the western campaign for the Nicene faith came to be spearheaded by some gifted figures, who were able to transfer the wisdom of the Greeks to their own context in ways which undoubtedly contributed to the ultimate demise of Arianism and to the evolution of a solid theological literature in the West. Two in particular stand out.

HILARY OF POITIERS

The first is Hilary (c. 315–67/8), bishop of Poitiers from around 350 or so, classically labelled 'the Athanasius of the West'. We know almost nothing about Hilary's early life, but he was clearly given a good education prior to embarking on his ecclesiastical career (Galtier 1960; Daniélou *et al.* 1968; Labande 1969). As a bishop, he gained a reputation as a firm supporter of the Nicene position, and he chose to sever relations with those of his Gaulish brethren who had succumbed to political pressure and acquiesced in the condemnation of Athanasius (Doignon 1971; Brennecke 1984). Like others of his persuasion, he found himself exiled by Constantius in 356, for four years (Williams 1991). He was sent to Phrygia, where he came into contact with eastern theology first-hand, and expanded his understanding of the kinds of strategies adopted by anti-Arians in the East. He developed some sympathies for the homoiousian ('similar-substance') approach, which he felt could, if understood correctly, be an appropriate way of settling the affair. It appeared to avoid the dangers of modalism implicit in claims to literal identity of divine substance on the one hand while disowning the idea of dissimilarity of substance advocated by harder-line Arians on the other. He participated in the Council of Seleucia in 359 among the ranks of the homoiousians. He returned to Gaul in 360 (Sulpicius Severus, *Chronicle* 2.45, says Constantius allowed him to go back because he was causing too much trouble for the Arians in the East), where he resumed wide-ranging anti-Arian activities in an essentially homoiousian style, first at a synod in Paris, where he persuaded his fellow-bishops to renounce the creed of Rimini (which he famously deemed a 'blasphemy'), and then, more boldly, at Milan, where he attempted unsuccessfully to unseat the homoian bishop Auxentius who had occupied the see since 355 (Borschardt 1966; Williams 1992).

Hilary engaged in scholarly activity throughout his career, and he produced a number of important works. His *De synodis*, written in exile in 359, is an attempt to explain eastern theologies to the West in a way that would encourage western Nicenes to identify more closely with the homoiousians in the East. A number of other works provide valuable information on the doctrinal history of the period, and fill in some of the details of Hilary's opposition to homoians such as Saturninus of Arles and Auxentius of Milan. Hilary also completed spiritually focused commentaries on Matthew's gospel and on the Psalms; the latter in particular owes a considerable debt to Origen's allegorizing approach. He is also significant in being the first definite writer of hymns in Latin, though only three of these survive (incomplete at that). Like Ambrose after him, he was inspired to import Greek hymnic forms into the western church, having seen their value as popular media for theological truths.

By far his most significant work, also composed in exile, is his *De Trinitate*, in 12 books (also known to Jerome [*De viris illustribus* 100] as *Adversus Arianos libri*, and to others as *De fide*), which constitutes not so much a full-scale Trinitarian theology (typically for the period, there is little said on the Spirit) as an elaborate defence of the divinity of the Son (Smulders 1944). He sketches a position midway between Arianism on one side and the western tendency to Sabellianism (or monarchian modalism) on the other, anxious not only to reject any denigration of the Son's participation in the Godhead but also to avoid a blurring of the distinctions between Father and Son; his fear is that the *homoousios* label as used by some pro-Nicenes runs the latter risk. The equality of Father and Son is to be thought of in terms of a *unitas substantiae*, a unity of substance, not a *unio personae*, an identity of personhood. In his attempt to account for the divinity of Christ while rejecting the Arian logic that Christ's human weaknesses rendered him inferior to God, Hilary develops a Christology which is essentially docetic. He posits a three-stage process of incarnation and glorification, speaking respectively of Christ's pre-existence, his humiliation, and his elevation or divinization of human nature in resurrection and ascension. But though the incarnation is said to have involved kenosis or *exinanitio* to the extent that Christ renounced the form of God to appear as a servant (cf. Phil. 2:6–8), the identity of his nature with the nature of God the Father meant that his human body was in fact celestial, for the one who dwelt within it remained divine. As naturally constituted, Christ's human nature was free from normal human needs; amazing feats like walking on water were not, strictly speaking, miraculous for him at all, for he was simply exercising his divine prerogatives. His passion and death were certainly real, but only because the divine Word within him, which was itself incapable of suffering, condescended to allow his human nature to experience these things. Hilary has a strong picture of two natures and of a unipersonality in Christ, but in the end he sees the humanity as overwhelmed by the divinity (Hanson 1988: 492–502; Ladaria 1989).

Hilary's method is heavily grounded in the exegesis of biblical texts, and he is adamant that the only valid epistemology for theological work lies in scriptural revelation; he sees extra-textual tradition, like philosophy, as inherently subordinate, though his eastern influences led him to develop a distinctly Platonized spirituality (Newlands 1978). His debts to Tertullian are substantial. His style is frequently difficult, obscured both by the force of his rhetoric and by his polemical

orientation. His Trinitarian theology never truly gets off the ground, for his pre-occupation with the issue of generation focuses his argument almost entirely upon Father and Son, and he does not move beyond an agental account of the Spirit to discuss the wider question of intra-divine relations and pneumatological personhood. Nevertheless, Hilary should not be judged anachronistically. For the 350s and 360s his work was pioneering, and whatever difficulties attach to some of his own formulations he played a considerable role in the transference of a mature Christological reflection from the East to the West. Not without cause did Hilary bequeath his own cult in Gaul (Van Dam 1993: 28–41, 155–61): the range of his travels and influence, and the intensity of his work as exegete and constructive thinker, meant that his relatively short episcopal career carried a disproportionately high significance.

AMBROSE OF MILAN

The person who contributed more than anyone else to the demise of Arianism in the West was, however, Ambrose (c. 339–97), bishop of Milan from 374. I offer a much fuller account of him in Chapter 47 of this volume. Born at Trier, son of the praetorian prefect of Gaul, Ambrose was given a solid classical education and pursued a career in the imperial civil service, becoming governor of Aemilia-Liguria, with a base in Milan. In 374, still unbaptized, he was elected successor to Auxentius, the long-serving homoian bishop of the city. After initial reluctance, he consented, and was baptized and consecrated within the space of a week (Homes Dudden 1935; Paredi 1964a; McLynn 1994; Ramsey 1997: 1–54). Despite its unpromising start – an almost totally ill-prepared spiritual leader assuming a see dominated by homoian clergy vigorously opposed by a minority pro-Nicene party – his 22-year episcopate transformed the social standing of the Catholic faith in the West, not only in North Italy but much further afield as well (Williams 1995).

The key to Ambrose's success lay partly in his ability to master a great deal of theological wisdom remarkably quickly and to articulate it with outstanding effect as a gifted pulpit orator; partly in the leadership skills he had developed as a lawyer and administrator, and partly (and not least) in his ability to use a strategic location and uncertain times to best effect. Though he inherited a large see still very much overshadowed by its powerful Roman neighbour, when the western imperial court was moved to Milan in 381 he was afforded access to the ear of emperors in a way that no western bishop before him had been. A consummate political operator, he sought to exploit this advantage to the full. His quest was to create a church worthy of a capital city, and to develop an ecclesial identity which would be acknowledged by the sophisticates of court society, one which would serve as a normative model for lesser bishops as they in turn organized their sees. Ambrose laboured to sustain an impression of awesome ecclesiastical authority: any attempt by Caesar to usurp what was God's was to be firmly and publicly opposed. He could see to it that a significant pagan symbol like the Altar of Victory was not restored to the Roman Senate-house (384); that homoian attempts to have basilicas sequestered in the name of the emperor were refused, even in the face of military pressure (385–6); that legal

penalties imposed upon a bishop who had orchestrated the destruction of a synagogue were lifted (388); and that Theodosius himself did public penance for having allowed a massacre of innocent citizens at Thessalonica (390). Through it all, there was a considerable measure of theatre in what Ambrose was seen to be and do, and his own position was often in reality far less secure than the spectacle suggested; but he succeeded thanks to his genius for managing even unpromising circumstances.

The outlines of Ambrose's political activity are sketched elsewhere in this volume (Chapter 47); here we note only the intellectual tools with which he achieved his ends. First and foremost were his skills as a preacher, for it was his sermons which formed the basis of a large proportion of his writing. One of the greatest orators of the early church, Ambrose learned to charm hearers as discriminating as Augustine with the dense learning and pastoral intensity of his style (Nauroy 1985; Oberhelman 1991: 21–62). His ability to read Greek fluently allowed him to devote himself to the study of eastern authorities: he rapidly assimilated the exegetical techniques of Philo and Origen, and imbibed the theologies of Athanasius, Basil, and Didymus (Savon 1977; Lucchesi 1977; Pizzolato 1965, 1978; Pasini 1990). A number of Milan's intellectuals were keen on neo-Platonist texts: Ambrose could also evoke Plotinus, Porphyry, and other Platonist writers in his homilies, although not all of his intended targets appreciated it (Courcelle 1968: 93–138). In intellectual terms, Ambrose's greatest importance lies in his mediation of Greek thought to the Latin church. More than Hilary or any writer before him, he was able to popularize the idioms of eastern Nicene thinking in the vernacular of his people. Not the least of his channels for doing so lay in song: he introduced to Milan the Greek practice of congregational singing, and composed simple yet evocative hymns celebrating a fully consubstantial Christ and a truly divine Spirit. The form of the 'Ambrosian hymn', iambic dimeters arranged in quatrains to be sung antiphonally, caught on with remarkable success, and proved a seminal force in the development of the western liturgy (Fontaine 1992).

Ambrose's exegesis (Quasten 1986: 153–65) is concentrated on the Old Testament, though he also produced an exposition of Luke's gospel (Graumann 1994). His chief foci are the stories of creation and fall in Genesis (his *Hexaemeron* draws extensively on Basil's work of the same name), the lives of the patriarchs, the Psalms, and the characters of Job and David. A number of treatises are ostensibly on other Old Testament exemplars such as Elijah and Naboth, but they are in fact largely set-piece moral diatribes against evils such as avarice and usury. An important group of texts are devoted to ascetic subjects – the promotion of virginity and the commending of chaste widowhood as superior to the married state. Ambrose contributed a great deal to the development of female asceticism in the West (Brown 1988: 341–65). He preached funeral sermons for the emperors Valentinian II and Theodosius; we also have two homilies on the death of his brother Satyrus, who died at an early age in 378 (Biermann 1995), and both a stenographic record and a redacted version of some significant catechetical addresses to initiates (*De sacramentis* and *De mysteriis*), which sketch a striking theology of the holy privileges into which the mystery of the sacraments conducts the humble believer (Botte 1980). A valuable collection of 91 letters, arranged, on the Plinian model, into ten books (nine 'private', one 'public'), is deliberately shaped in order to show the bishop in the best possible light (Zelzer

1989). His most important dogmatic works are books on the Nicene faith (*De fide*), addressed to Gratian, and a sequel text on the Holy Spirit (Quasten 1986: 169–70). His debts to the literary and philosophical traditions of the classical world can be gauged in his frequent evocation of secular literature (Zelzer 1987); his most enduring moral treatise is his *De officiis*, a manual on clerical ethics based directly upon Cicero, and thus significantly influenced by Stoicism (Testard 1984–92; Davidson 1995). Ambrose, the former governor who had worked hard to sustain his place among a social elite, was an intellectual who stood at the confluence of two cultural streams. Always he insisted on the supremacy of biblical revelation over all secular philosophy (Madec 1974; Lenox-Conyngham 1993), but the success of his ministry depended heavily upon his ability to represent an impressive fusion of the traditional and the revolutionary in a new paradigm supremely adapted to its social context.

Ambrose was not an original thinker, after the fashion of an Origen or a Gregory of Nyssa or an Augustine. He was primarily a leader, an organizer, a rhetorician, a controller of people and situations. His theological ideas are overwhelmingly derivative. His sermons do not strike modern readers as profound in expository terms: they appear more like a dense synthesis of neo-Platonist spirituality, allegory, and stereotyped moralizing, often seemingly governed less by systematic plans than by an *ad hoc* pastoral and political pragmatism. Ambrose paints a world pervaded by sharp antitheses, in which the Christian journey, beginning in the waters of baptism, involves a radical break with the *saeculum*, and a path of conscious ascent away from its bewitching voices of corruption towards the goal of eschatological oneness with God, while all the while the social and cultural purchase to be gained by an imperial Catholicism is to be exploited for all it is worth.

But ‘originality’ was a considerably less precise ideal in Late antiquity than it is today; Ambrose’s creativity lay in his gift for collating the results of others’ reflection into a cohesive package which was right for his time. In the process, he anticipated quite a number of concepts that would be articulated more comprehensively in later years in the West. Ambrose adumbrated aspects of Augustinian thinking on original sin (Homes Dudden 1935: 612–24), and on the validity of a just war (Swift 1970). His theology of the Eucharist assumed that a supernatural change takes place in the elements when the priest recites the dominical words (Johanny 1968); the metaphysical exploration of such a notion would of course come later. His advocacy of female asceticism made a great deal of the example of Mary (Neumann 1962), and his language encouraged the evolution of Marian veneration in the medieval West. His musings on the dangers of private property have been taken as evidence for an inchoate patristic socialism, but in reality his concern was to denounce in general terms the abuses of a grasping drive for possession, not to set out a proto-Marxist political agenda (Swift 1979). His depictions of natural law, closely fed by Stoic sources, would nevertheless inform important elements of medieval thought (Maes 1967).

Where Ambrose is at his most disappointing is on Christology and Trinitarian theology (Markschies 1995). His concern in both areas is to articulate anti-Arian orthodoxy as currently represented by his eastern models, but given the momentous debates which were taking place in his time over divine ontology and the psychological dimensions of the incarnation, and given his ability to understand the

language in which these ideas were being thrashed out, it is frustrating to find that his contributions to that theological discourse consist heavily in rhetorical vituperation of his opponents and a blanket condemnation of all Arians as equally wrong, rather than in a sustained engagement with the issues. The quality of argument in *De fide* has been described as ‘beneath contempt’ in theological terms (Hanson 1988: 669), and though *De Spiritu Sancto* is the first western treatise on its subject, it does not progress much beyond a lengthy demonstration of the Spirit’s essential divinity. For all his personal piety and all his rhetoric on spirituality, speculative dogmatics was never Ambrose’s forte. He was far better at engineering public victories over the Arians and their sponsors, as he did notoriously at the Council of Aquileia in 381, or in confrontation with the court of Valentinian II in 385–6.

Ambrose could not always out-argue his opponents, but he generally managed to outclass them. In the process, he expanded and strengthened the bridge that Hilary had already begun to construct along which Greek theology was contextualized with a new confidence in the Latin world, and his heavily politicized style engineered the definitive eclipse of anti-Nicene forces in the patristic West. It fell to more original minds than his to go further; but without his masterly preparatory work their achievements would not have been possible.

JEROME

With Jerome (c. 347–420), we encounter one whose importance does consist squarely in the quality of his scholarship and in his ability to articulate in his own brilliant way ideas nurtured by both eastern and western roots. Jerome spent a good part of his life in the East, and employed a fair element of it in attacking western enemies; yet his mindset was fundamentally a Latin one, and he was anything but an uncritical friend of eastern perspectives and practices (Kelly 1975; Duval 1988; Chapter 46 of this volume).

Born in an insignificant town, Stridon in Dalmatia, the son of prosperous Christian parents, Jerome was educated at Rome, where he was baptized. While spending some time in Gaul in his early twenties, he developed an interest in the monastic life, and after a spell at Aquileia he moved to Syria, where he lived for a while as a hermit at Chalcis, east of Antioch, and devoted himself to language study, particularly the acquisition of Hebrew. After getting embroiled in a number of quarrels with other hermits, he found his life in the desert an excessive strain, and he returned to Antioch, where he was ordained a presbyter.

He was in Constantinople in the important years of 380–1, and was able to acquaint himself with the cream of contemporary Greek writing, supplementing his experience in exegetical techniques with a deeper reading in the big Christological issues of the day. Back in Rome from 382 to 385, he acted as *de facto* assistant to the ageing pope Damasus, and formed close friendships with a number of aristocratic Christian women, to whom he became a spiritual tutor and counsellor (see generally Clark 1986). His elegant epistles, brilliant treatises, and eloquent protreptics for asceticism appeared to promise him great things, perhaps the chair of Damasus himself, but his biting satirical attacks on the *mores* of the Roman clergy also made

him deeply unpopular with his ecclesiastical peers, who saw it as rather anomalous that he was ardently preaching ascetic virtues and criticizing them while enjoying delicately close relations with his female patrons, especially with one widow in particular, the wealthy Paula. So long as Jerome enjoyed Damasus' patronage, little could be done, but on the advent of Siricius he was investigated, condemned, and effectively banished from Rome. After a period of travel around the East, including Egypt, accompanied by his entourage of devoted women, he settled in Bethlehem in 386, and established a monastic community, financed initially with Paula's wealth; Paula herself set up a convent nearby. The rest of his life was devoted to study, writing, and teaching, and the administration of what amounted to a fairly liberal ascetic regime.

A bibliophile from an early age, Jerome stands out as the most learned of the western Fathers, and one of the greatest biblical scholars in the history of the church (Sparks 1970). His most remarkable achievement was his new translation of the Scriptures, launched by a commission from Damasus. The Latin Bible of the fourth century was notoriously corrupt, with differing versions in existence in Gaul, North Africa and Italy: Jerome famously remarks that there were almost as many textual forms as there were manuscripts (*Epistle Prefatory to the Gospels*, addressed to Damasus). A new edition was sorely needed. It is a mistake, however, to think that Jerome's work proceeded according to a uniform plan, or to imagine that he was personally responsible for every part of what we have come to think of as the *editio vulgata*. His initial project was to produce a new rendering of the four gospels – not so much a fresh translation of the Greek as a synthesis of some of the existing Latin versions in conformity with the Greek text. The completed work was presented to Damasus shortly before his death in 384. This was followed by a new version of the Psalter, a rapid and rather crude rendering of the Septuagint (traditionally, but unreliably, associated with the Roman Psalter, the standard Roman version until the time of Pope Pius V in the sixteenth century). In c. 392, Jerome was able to replace this with another translation, the so-called 'Gallican Psalter' (so named after its subsequent popularity in Gaul), which used the text of the Septuagint given in Origen's massive *Hexapla*. Further work on other parts of the Old Testament convinced him that any translation relying only on a Greek text was simply not good enough: it was necessary to go back to the *veritas Hebraica* itself. As a rare example of a *vir trilinguis*, a scholar competent not just in Greek and Latin but in the prized Hebrew as well, he was exceptionally well-equipped to take up the challenge, and he embarked on a completely new rendering of the Hebrew Scriptures. Pursued intermittently, the work occupied about a decade and a half of his life, from 390/1 until 405/6. It included a third recension of the Psalter, based on the Hebrew, though this version never attained the liturgical popularity of its 'Gallican' predecessor, which was ultimately incorporated into the Vulgate manuscripts in its stead.

Jerome's return to the Hebrew was ground-breaking, not least because he urged an adherence to a Hebrew canon, and argued that the deuterocanonical Greek texts included in the Septuagint but rejected by non-Hellenistic Judaism were to be regarded as apocryphal. His work was also controversial. He was sharply criticized by Augustine and others, who argued that he was in danger of relapsing into a Judaizing faith by abandoning the Greek antecedents of the Bible as it had come to



Figure 24.1 *Saint Jerome Reading*, by Alvise Vivarini (Venetian, 1475/80). Copyright National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kreiss Collection.

be known in the West. He could hardly be faulted, however, for his linguistic rigour, or for the care with which he set about his background research. As part of his work he undertook to enquire into questions of topography and etymology, expanding on existing reference manuals in Greek and drawing also on rabbinical wisdom. He produced a number of technical commentaries which sought to discuss textual and philological issues; the most valuable of these are on the prophets and on Genesis (Kamesar 1993; Hayward 1995).

Exegetically, his tastes are eclectic, reflecting the range of his influences: Antioch, Alexandria, and the perspectives of the rabbis pull in differing directions (Duval 1973; Jay 1985; Dennis Brown 1992). Overall, a concern for the literal sense of Scripture predominates, but there is room for spiritual interpretation as well, and in the end he never really evolves a consistent methodology. Given their piecemeal release over a period of years, his biblical translations themselves are patchy in

quality, and it took time for them to gain acceptance; they were used alongside existing versions for some while. In the end, however, the obvious superiority of their scholarship to anything that had gone before in the West won them the recognition they deserved, and from the sixth century onwards they started to be collected into a new Vulgate Bible. The remainder of the New Testament was not translated by Jerome, and the identity of its reviser(s) remains enigmatic. It is cited first by Pelagius in his work on Paul, and one guess is that Pelagius' associate, the elusive Rufinus 'the Syrian' (Bonner 1972: 19–31), was involved in it. The oldest extant manuscript of the Vulgate, the Codex Amiatinus, was produced in Northumberland in the last years of the seventh century, but only in the ninth century did the new collection become a standard text in any meaningful sense, and attempts to homogenize it went on for centuries after that.

The other side to Jerome, already to be glimpsed in the acerbic letters with which he had mocked the clergy of Rome, was his fondness for invective. Almost his entire career was littered with controversy, and he left broken relationships everywhere (Rebenich 1992). For many years he was an ardent devotee of Origen, and translated a whole series of his homilies into Latin. In the fierce controversy that flared up surrounding Origen's theology in the last years of the fourth century (Clark 1992), he changed his mind, partly under the influence of Epiphanius of Salamis, and became a bitter and tendentious opponent. Matters were not helped when his old friend Rufinus of Aquileia published a new (and rather free) translation of Origen's *De principiis*, in a bid to demonstrate that their former mentor was indeed orthodox, and referred in his preface to Jerome's earlier support for him. The friendship of Rufinus and Jerome was no more, and the ensuing years witnessed a bitter war between the two, during which Jerome released his own translation of *De principiis* to prove just how heretical Origen really was (this work is now lost). Again, positive evaluation of Ambrose's contributions to the subject of virginity soon gave way to scathing denunciations of Ambrose's lack of originality, couched in barely disguised anonymity (Paredi 1964b). More predictable and impassioned salvos were fired at foes such as Helvidius, the Roman layman who denied the *post partum* virginity of Mary, and Jovinian, the monk whose anti-ascetic ideology also evoked the ire of Ambrose and Augustine. Vigilantius, a priest from Aquitania, visited Bethlehem in 395, and his stay ended in a quarrel: years later, Jerome was accusing him of opposing sacred ideals such as clerical celibacy and the principles expressed in the cult of the martyrs.

Jerome's propensity to berate his opponents produced the most brilliant satirical writing of Late antiquity (Wiesen 1964). His copious epistles and polemical treatises make for far more entertaining reading than the technicalities of his commentaries or the hagiographical vignettes he produced to celebrate the lives of various eastern hermits (though even some of his historical texts, like the catalogue of eminent Christian writers in *De viris illustribus*, the first example of a patrology, contain their share of caustic humour). The downside, apart from the obvious poisoning of so many of his relationships, was that his contributions to theological debate seldom proved very acute. Even in his last years, spent attacking Pelagianism, he showed a much greater ability to vilify Pelagius' supporters than to grasp the doctrinal issues they were raising.

It would not be hard to show that many of the accusations Jerome levelled at his foes and critics reflected deeper-seated insecurities and struggles within his own psyche – not least over the ambiguities of sexuality and self-denial, or over his relationship to a *saeculum* whose literary legacy he held dearly yet uneasily. The most obvious sign of this latter tension is his famous dream in which he was turned away from heaven for being a Ciceronian, not a Christian, and his vow to devote himself thenceforth to sacred texts rather than to the classics (*Epistle* 22.30) – a pose later amended to the claim that the best features of Latin literature could in fact be turned to good use (*Ep.* 70): Hagendahl 1958: 318–28). A large number of European paintings depict Jerome in the wilderness, beating his chest with a stone to drive out the temptation to pursue classical Latin literature (see Figure 24.2).

Jerome did not suffer fools gladly, and to him any sustained dissent to his own principles, moral, doctrinal, liturgical, or scholarly, tended to look like the effrontery of a fool. The genius which made him the giant that he was brought an arrogance with it, and Jerome hardly looks the better for it. Nevertheless, in an age when Greek forms remained so dominant he did a huge amount to restore the importance of Christianity's Hebraic inheritance; his enthusiasm was not matched again in the West until the Reformation. His prolific literary output also demonstrated poignantly that the greatest Christian learning could be expressed in Latin. For these symbolic achievements, more than for his angular nature, he deserves to be appreciated.

AUGUSTINE

None of the figures mentioned thus far, however, comes close in importance to Augustine (354–430), whose influence has pervaded not simply the history of the church but the entire course of western civilization (Brown 1967; O'Donnell 1985; Bonner 1986; Chadwick 1986; Kirwan 1989; Clark 1994; Scott 1995). Augustine is profiled in Chapter 48 of this volume.

His intellectual pilgrimage, filtered through the fine grid of his mature self-reflection, is famously captured in the first nine books of his *Confessions*, a text which deserves to be placed alongside the greatest works of European literature (Chadwick 1991; O'Donnell 1992; Courcelle 1963b). Born at Thagaste (the modern Souk-Ahras, in Algeria) to a pagan father and a devout mother, Augustine was made a catechumen as a child, but became estranged from the church as an adolescent. A reading of Cicero's (now lost) *Hortensius* inspired him to think seriously about moral and religious issues; disillusioned with the style of the Scriptures, he found himself drawn to alternative philosophies: first to astrology, then to Manichaeism, which seemed to him intellectually superior to the Christian message. He became a teacher of rhetoric, and for a decade, in Carthage and Rome, he remained associated with the Manichees as an *auditor*, or second-grade adherent, which allowed him to avoid the strict ascetic standards imposed upon the higher-tier 'Elect', and continue to live with his concubine. As his studies in the philosophy of rhetoric became more sophisticated, he grew disenchanted with the Manichaean account of cosmology and its answer to the problem of evil, and began to explore more sceptical paths. In 384,



Figure 24.2 *Saint Jerome in the Wilderness*, Anonymous painting from Padua, c. 1450/60.
Copyright National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection.

newly appointed to the professorship of rhetoric at Milan, and plunged into existential crisis (in the interests of his career, he had reluctantly separated from his concubine, the mother of his son, Adeodatus, to become engaged to a young heiress), he went to hear the great Ambrose preach, and became deeply impressed by the power of his rhetoric, particularly his ability to interpret the difficulties of the Old Testament in an allegorical fashion. He also imbibed neo-Platonist ideas by studying Plotinus and Porphyry, and began to resolve some of his difficulties with problems such as the nature of the soul and the question of evil.



Figure 24.3 Augustine of Hippo. Courtesy of the Billy Graham Center Museum, Wheaton, Illinois.

His account of his conversion experience of July 386 is a classic: sitting in his garden, worn out physically and mentally, he heard a child's voice calling, *Tolle, lege*, 'Take and read', and turning at random to Rom. 13:13–14 (*Conf.* 8.12.28–30), he felt summoned to abandon sexual licence and 'put on' Christ. Jettisoning career and marriage, he aimed to be baptized. First he withdrew to a friend's estate at Cassiciacum to recuperate physically and explore with a group of friends and family some of the issues with which he was still wrestling: the nature of happiness, the basis of knowledge, the shape of providence, and the immortality of the soul. The dialogues were published in imitation of the model of Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*. After receiving baptism from Ambrose at Easter 387, he moved to Rome. Following the death of his mother, he returned to North Africa, where for almost three years he lived at Thagaste with a group of friends in a kind of impromptu ascetic community. During this time he continued to write extensively, seeking to branch out from the general intellectual preoccupations of his time as teacher of the liberal arts to explore more specifically theological questions. In 391, on a trip to the seaport of Hippo Regius, he found himself press-ganged into ordination as a priest by the elderly local bishop, Valerius. In 395 he became Valerius' co-adjutor, and assumed the office of sole bishop not long afterwards. Immersing himself in the study of Scripture, particularly the epistles of Paul, he expanded his credentials as a theological teacher, and established his episcopal residence as an ascetic chapter-house



Figure 24.4 *The Saint {Augustine} Teaching Rhetoric*. Painting by Niccolò di Pietro (fl. Venice 1394–1430) in the Vatican. Copyright the Pontifical Monuments, Museums and Galleries, the Vatican.

and mini-seminary. For all his cerebral nature, he proved a hard-working pastor (tracing evermore critical analyses of human nature the more he felt himself confronted with the evidences of sinfulness in others and in himself), and a powerful rhetorician (Van der Meer 1961).

But Augustine's most enduring influence was achieved by his pen. When he died on 28 August 430, while Hippo was being besieged by the Vandals, he left an enormous literary legacy, the bulk of which has survived intact, his library having mercifully escaped the fires which destroyed much of his city the following year. In all, it runs to a little over five million words. Even a brief summary of the texts and a tiny selection of the scholarly literature they have elicited occupies close to fifty pages in a standard patrology (Quasten 1986: 355–400). Augustine has generated

an industry of academic enterprise, the scale of which can be gauged in the annual bibliographies collected in indices such as *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes*. Looking back on his writings towards the end of his life, he himself assumed a threefold division of his work — books, letters, and treatises — but he never got beyond reviewing the books, which he counted to 232, spread over 93 works. His biographer Possidius enumerates 1,030 books, letters, and treatises in all, but maintains that this is not exhaustive (*PL* 46.5–22, an *indculus* based upon the bishop's library catalogue). Modern synopses opt for more complex categorizations, labelling the texts autobiographical, philosophical, apologetical, dogmatic, moral-pastoral, monastic, exegetical, polemical, sermonic, epistolary, and so on; and both sermons and letters have been extended by new discoveries in recent times. Augustine seemed to write on almost everything: vast pastoral treatises on John's gospel and the Psalms, drawing on some of his hundreds of sermons; a huge dogmatic study on the Trinity (*De Trinitate*), the greatest of its genre in western theology, seeking relations rather than 'persons' within the Godhead and identifying traces of the divine triunity in human psychology; a learned enquiry into the relationship between hermeneutics, preaching, and culture (*De doctrina Christiana*), profoundly influential on subsequent western biblical interpretation; a magisterial exploration of history and society visualized in terms of the contrasting purposes of God and human agency, part apologetic, part polemic, part political analysis and philosophy of history (*De civitate Dei*); and a host of exegetical, moral, philosophical, and polemical texts, on subjects ranging from the exposition of Genesis to theories of rhythm (*De musica*), from the origins of evil to the merits of chaste widowhood, from the sin of lying to the correct places in which to bury the dead (*De cura pro mortuis gerenda*). Isidore of Seville (c. 560–636) recalls the saying that anyone who claims to have read all of Augustine must be a liar (*PL* 83.1109).

A great deal of Augustine's output had its origins in controversy. He spent the first years of his episcopate attacking the Manichees; he then moved on to the Donatists, whose dominance in North Africa posed such a major challenge to him pastorally; and the last period of his life, from 412 to 430, was spent in intensifying opposition to Pelagianism. All of these movements, he was convinced, required to be tackled head-on, not just because of their social influence but because they were *wrong* in intellectual terms. Against his erstwhile associates the Manichees, with their denigration of the Old Testament and their dualistic cosmology which conceptualized evil as a force too powerful for good completely to eliminate, he spent his early years at Hippo arguing for the primordial goodness of the creator's purpose, the reality of human free-will, and the nature of evil as *privatio boni* (Evans 1982). He sets out an epistemology of faith, and underscores the importance of religious authority both in texts and in the church. Against the Donatists, and their preoccupation with personal holiness and ecclesial purity, he developed the seminal western theology of the sacraments we have already noted. He buttressed his argument that the church on earth is irreducibly a mixed body by asserting a doctrine of predestination, by which it could be said that God alone knows those who are truly his within the church. Against the Pelagians, and their contention that divine commands presuppose the human capacity freely to comply, he first set out defences of original sin and the need for infant baptism, then elaborated increasingly forceful

arguments linking the transmission of Adam's sin with sexual intercourse and maintaining that human beings are naturally helpless and incapable save for the grace of God's eternal decree to predestine a certain constituency to salvation and to give them the ability to persevere to the end (Rist 1969; Bonner 1987).

Augustine's writings are universally pervaded by a fascination for the relationship between the human and God (Burnaby 1938; TeSelle 1970). Knowledge of God and knowledge of self, always inextricably linked, lie at the centre of everything. To explore what it means to know and to love is to analyse every aspect of human experience. Augustine brilliantly weaves together the epistemological and moral preoccupations of ancient philosophy with the anthropology, cosmology, and teleology of the Christian narrative of creation, redemption, and eschaton. The resulting synthesis of Platonist and biblical perspectives is a *tour de force* that has affected areas ranging from spirituality to sexuality, from theories of human cognition to understandings of microcosmic contingency.

Whether he is talking of nature, sin and grace (Burns 1980); of the tension between self-love and love for God (O'Donovan 1980); of the subconscious (O'Daly 1987), and the implications of human memory for the conceptualizing of time, and eternity (Pelikan 1986; Kirwan 1989: 151–86; Rist 1994: 73–85); of verbal and non-verbal communication or 'signs' (Markus 1957); of meditation and cognitive development (Stock 1996); of beauty and the disclosure of truth (Harrison 1992); of morality and society (Deane 1963); or of history, providence, and cosmic destiny (Markus 1970), for Augustine intellectual expression is always intensely personal and contemplative. Truth, for him, mattered more than anything, and the search for it could never be a dilettante diversion from some other, ostensibly more 'real' world. Augustine's genius lay in his ability to communicate the findings of his enquiry in ways which remained personal yet transcended his individual context. Ultimately, he came to believe that the parameters of the quest to which he had devoted himself were established for all human beings by a God who had designed such creatures for himself so that the real rest they crave, intellectual and spiritual, could be found only in him, and that this God had, despite the enormity of human evil, graciously made it possible for these undeserving transgressors to experience holistic contentment in a restored relationship with himself. Yet even from his earliest days, Augustine seemed to sense a powerful symbiosis between intellectual exploration and personal, inner peace. The ascertaining of true reality spells absolute fulfilment; contemplation is inspired by the desire for God.

Augustine's dominance of the West has inevitably brought him both veneration and opprobrium. The fifth and sixth centuries saw the enshrining of his teaching on sin and grace, and the entire course of medieval and Reformation thought was affected by his ideas on the church and salvation. At the same time, critical reactions to his views began in his own lifetime, and have never gone away since. Modernity has been full of attempts to blame him for almost everything that has gone wrong in western civilization. Undoubtedly, the history of Augustinianism has its exceedingly dark sides, not least in the torrid wrangles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, against which some of the protests of the post-Enlightenment period have been inevitable. Too often, however, there has been a casual dismissal of Augustine, rather than an attempt to engage with him. It is less easy to dismiss Augustine's

evaluation of the human condition than some of his critics have imagined, and it is especially difficult to share the boundless moral optimism that has been essential to many of those critics' assumptions as we view things from the vantage-point of the twenty-first century. Problems and tensions certainly abound in his thought; and yet, beyond all the figures of the patristic age (western or eastern) Augustine seems like a modern person, whose sensibilities and preoccupations position him remarkably close to our times. Again and again, he seems to be asking the kinds of questions we ask today. Still more astonishingly for those whose impressions have been formed by caricatures rather than first-hand encounter, we even find him anticipating some of the answers we might give to those questions as well. Like his predecessors, Augustine belongs in the world of Late Classical antiquity (Marrou 1949; Hagendahl 1967), but, far more than they, he also transcends it, and opens up a much larger canvas of human thought and feeling (Gilson 1961). He deserves to be explored, interrogated, critiqued, acknowledged, and disagreed with, but in a spirit of respect, not as a bogeyman.

PELAGIANISM

Pelagianism, the last of the major theological developments in the patristic West, drew its primary support from the upper classes and the intelligentsia of Rome and spread in accordance with their migration, first to areas such as Sicily where they held estates, then, after the fall of Rome, to North Africa and the East (Brown 1972: 183–207, 208–26). It was essentially a lay movement. It was also far more variegated than its name suggests; there was considerable diversity and development within it, and Pelagius' own views were by no means those of all Pelagians. Pelagius' personal history (de Plinval 1943; Ferguson 1956; Evans 1968; Rees 1988) has been buried beneath an avalanche of polemical caricature. He was probably British by birth (early 350s), and had received a sound education in classical literature and philosophy by the time he arrived in Rome in the 380s. Though Jerome and Augustine refer to him as a 'monk', he never belonged to any obvious religious community, and was never ordained as a priest. He was a layman: but a layman in a period when a number of cultivated lay-people, male and female, were exercising a prominent role in the Roman church. He served as spiritual adviser to one of the key aristocratic Christian families, the Anicii, in much the way that Jerome did to another, the Aemilii.

Pelagius' message combined personal asceticism with a passionate insistence that the world could be changed for the better. At a time of deep political uncertainty, when ascetic ideals seemed to many aristocratic Christians to be incompatible with any significant secular involvement, he attracted rich patrons and inspired young disciples with his pleas for commitment to reform. He stood in direct opposition to Manichaeism, whose resignation at the injustices of an intrinsically corrupt material world had found considerable support among Rome's intellectuals. Contrary to the Manichaean logic, human beings were endowed with the precious gift of free-will, and were thus (theoretically, at least) capable of living sinless lives. Tolerance of sin as a human inevitability was unacceptable: there was a divine imperative to pursue

holiness and moral transformation. Augustine's famous prayer in *Conf.* 10.29.40; 30.45; 37.60, 'Give what you command and command what you will', seemed to Pelagius to reflect a despairing acceptance of human incapacity, turning the individual into a puppet and undermining the whole basis of moral effort.

On the fall of Rome, Pelagius sought refuge in Africa, accompanied by a number of his supporters, most prominent of whom was a lawyer called Celestius (also of British extraction), who proved to have a far more combative temperament than his mentor. Pelagius moved on to Palestine soon afterwards, evidently without provoking any particular theological controversy; Celestius remained in Carthage, where he thrust himself into local theological debates on the nature of the soul and the solidarity of the human race in the sin of Adam. Celestius argued that infants were born into the same state that Adam was in prior to his fall, and so baptism was not for the remission of sins but for sanctification. His case was logical enough, but it brought him swift condemnation. When he applied to become a priest, he was denounced for heresy by Paulinus, a deacon of Milan, who happened to be in Carthage on business, and at a local council in 411 his views were officially condemned. He then left for Ephesus, where he succeeded in persuading a more accommodating church community to accept him, and was ordained in 415.

Pelagius, in Palestine, got himself embroiled in the Origenist dispute, quarrelling with Jerome that humans have the capacity by the force of their will to resist evil and attain to perfection. By this time, Augustine had emerged from his intense labours against Donatism, and he began to get involved in the polemic against the sort of views propagated by Celestius. In 415, a Spanish presbyter, Paulus Orosius, arrived in Bethlehem, sent by Augustine. Orosius, already a doughty combatant of Priscillianism in his native country, took up the anti-Pelagian cause, and sought to link Pelagius with Celestius' errors. With the support of John, bishop of Jerusalem, Pelagius successfully defended himself, and at a provincial synod at Diospolis he was completely exonerated, after he had distanced himself from some of Celestius' more extreme language by affirming the necessity of divine grace for every moral achievement. The African bishops nevertheless chose to condemn both Pelagius and Celestius in councils at Milevis and Carthage in 416, and took steps to ensure the demise of their influence by urging Pope Innocent I to excommunicate them. Very soon after he consented to do so in January 417, however, Innocent died. His successor, Zosimus, was visited by Celestius, who impressed him with his high moral ideals. The African bishops stuck to their guns, and a furious phase of epistolary pamphleteering ensued, as Augustine and his supporters sought to whip up a widespread antagonism to Pelagius and Celestius. The two were condemned by the emperor Honorius in the spring of 418, following a riot at Rome in which the ringleaders (mysteriously) happened to be Pelagians; then, on 1 May, a council of the African church was convened at Carthage which denounced Pelagius, Celestius, and their supporters in a series of nine canons, and set out an unequivocal defence of the idea that sin and guilt are both transmitted by heredity. Not long afterwards, Zosimus capitulated to the pressure, acceding to the denunciation of the Pelagians and writing a circular letter, his famous *Tractoria*, to all the principal sees of East and West, requiring subscription to the anti-Pelagian position.

A group of South Italian bishops, led by Julian of Eclanum (c. 386–454), refused

to comply, and were deprived of their sees. Pelagius himself disappeared from sight not long afterwards; probably he died in the East sometime before 420. Julian, meantime, a dialectical and systematic theologian of considerable ability, embarked on a long and acrimonious war with Augustine that endured to the end of Augustine's days in 430. The papal attitude under Boniface I remained opposed to the Pelagian teachings. Celestius found some sympathy at Ephesus from Nestorius, but the papacy of Celestine I marked an even firmer rejection of the Pelagian cause, and Nestorius did himself no favours by getting involved in the affair when he found himself in theological troubles of his own at the Council of Ephesus in 431: both he and Celestius were condemned (Wickham 1989).

The Pelagian controversy produced a substantial literary legacy. Pelagius himself wrote a great deal, on themes exegetical, doctrinal, and moral-ascetical, but many of the works which circulated under his name are spurious, and others remain uncertain; debate continues on how best to classify them (Morris 1965). Some of his letters have been preserved among the writings of his opponents, Augustine and Jerome. Pelagius was a reluctant heretic (Rees 1988; Markus 1989). His Roman writings, especially his commentaries on the letters of Paul (which provide valuable evidence on the Latin texts of the fifth century, and reflect the growing popularity of the Vulgate; see e.g. de Bruyn 1998), are self-consciously traditional on the errors of Arianism and on the doctrine of the Trinity. He deliberately evokes the anti-Manichaean sentiments of Ambrose, Ambrosiaster ('Hilarius'), and Augustine. His moralizing dwells on standard ascetical themes: the virtues of constancy in adversity, the dangers of material riches, and the merits of virginity. Theologically, his concern was to debunk fatalism, and to outline a robust anthropology which would inspire serious warfare against evil. To blame heredity or to talk of the existential inevitability of sin was, he felt, to seek excuses for failure. The disobedience of Adam constituted a bad example, but human freedom remained, and by effort of will it was possible to resist sin. The issue for Pelagius was not the *necessity* of divine grace, but the *nature* of that grace. Grace lay in the endowment of humanity with the faculties of reason and free-will, and in the provision of another example, counter to Adam's, to enlighten and stimulate these faculties into the performance of moral duty. This example was to be found in the Old Testament law, and supremely in the perfect obedience of Christ. Pelagius' intentions were not to advocate unalloyed human autonomy or some kind of 'do-it-yourself' system of salvation, but to give what he regarded as an appropriate place to human responsibility and the obligation to ethical endeavour. He would undoubtedly have been uncomfortable with some of the views espoused by his followers. Like the Donatists, he strongly upheld the importance of baptism as an initiation into a community called to holy living (unlike them, he does not say much about the relationship of this group to the social entity of the visible church).

Augustine's initial response to such ideas was lukewarm, consisting chiefly of an insistence on the reality of evil as a universal disease and the consequent theological necessity of infant baptism to deal with its corrupting effects at the personal level. It was only after the exoneration of Pelagius and Celestius in the East and their claims to be articulating the traditional position that he sensed a challenge to the rigorist theology of North Africa which, to his mind, was the true Catholic faith (Bonner

1972). Had it not been for the collapse of Rome and the impact made by Pelagius in the East, the affair would never have assumed the significance that it did, and had it not been for the African church's final success in securing its views as the official western one by obtaining Zosimus' condemnation of the Pelagian views in 418, Augustine would never have worked out the synthesis of his logic on sin, grace, and predestination. It was in the heat of his bitter dialogue with Julian of Eclanum that he welded together what we think of as the Augustinian doctrine of sin and grace, connecting the transmission of original sin with sexual intercourse and insisting on the absolute moral helplessness of humanity but for the grace of a God who has predestined some to be saved and left others to be damned.

The evident pessimism of this theology did not find immediate favour in the West. Pelagian ideas continued to enjoy popularity in Britain in the 420s and 430s (Myres 1960; Markus 1986), and in Gaul there was considerable alarm among monastic groups that Augustine had gone too far, and undermined human responsibility altogether. The protest, spearheaded by John Cassian (c. 360–431/2) and his supporters around Marseilles (Chadwick 1968), endured in the years following Augustine's death, and evoked an uncompromising Augustinian defence from Prosper of Aquitaine (c. 390–463) (who later tempered his views markedly). The monks argued that while grace was necessary for salvation, human free-will was the necessary presupposition of the gospel invitation. Their position has misleadingly been dubbed 'semi-Pelagianism', implying that it deliberately sought to retain the gist of Pelagius' system while taking on board elements of Augustine's arguments. In fact, they were seeking to distance themselves from both Pelagius and the extremes of Augustine's predestinarianism (Tibiletti 1985). As Vincent of Lérins (d. before 450) insisted, they saw themselves as upholding a Catholic tradition on nature and grace that the narrower trajectory in Augustine's thought seemed to have abandoned; Vincent's famous 'canon' (*Commonitorium* 2.3) setting out the triple test of ecumenicity, antiquity, and universal consent as criterion of orthodoxy needs to be read against this polemical background. The controversy endured in Gaul into the early sixth century. The course of the debates was considerably affected by the growing prestige of Lérins and Arles as key ecclesiastical centres, well capable of writing their own theological agendas (Van Dam 1985): even when the 'semi-Pelagian' perspective was officially condemned through the influence of Caesarius of Arles (c. 470–542) at the Second Council of Orange in 529, the council endorsed a series of dogmatic *capitula* which stopped well short of Augustine's language and repudiated the idea of predestination to damnation. It may be that for many of Gaul's clergy, deeply conservative by temperament, the issues mattered little, given the more immediate challenges they faced from Burgundian and Visigothic Arianism.

Like Donatism, Pelagianism threw into relief the enduring differences between the theological traditions of North Africa, Italy and Gaul. Most significantly of all, it yielded not just a new 'heresy', but a new 'orthodoxy' as well, for Augustine's darker doctrine of sin and predestination did ultimately prevail in the West. Even then, however, the debates rumbled on throughout the Middle Ages, to resurface with a vengeance in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, in the Jansenist controversies, and in the arguments between Calvinists and Arminians from the

seventeenth century onwards. In the wake of Enlightenment assertions of human potential, and the implicit demise of such confidence now in the cultures of a post-modern world, their focus on the complex questions of freedom and determinism remains pertinent to this day.

IN RETROSPECT

Any survey such as this has to skim along the high points of its terrain, picking out only the giants (both the heroes and the villains, judged from the standpoint of later orthodoxy) who made the most obvious contributions to the intellectual story of the later West. A fuller account of the evidence would have to canvass the parts played by other key figures, such as the redoubtable Marius Victorinus Afer (fl. 360s–370s), celebrated *rhetor* and convert from paganism who produced (*inter alia*) an important series of Pauline commentaries and an intriguing neo-Platonist metaphysic of the Trinity which in certain respects anticipated Augustine's model; or Prudentius (348–c. 410), Spanish poet and extensive writer of elegant hymns, whose allegorical depiction of the struggle of the Christian soul, the *Psychomachia*, profoundly influenced later generations; or Paulinus of Nola (c. 353–431), scion of a wealthy noble family who threw up career and fortune to devote himself to the life of the sanctified scholar, channelling the energies of his literary gift into the production of an urbane Christian poetry and the maintenance of a wide-ranging correspondence with Christian and pagan peers; or the elusive 'Ambrosiaster' (fl. late fourth century), whose remarkably sophisticated commentaries on the Pauline epistles remained unrivalled until the sixteenth century; or the missionary-bishop Martin of Tours (d. 397), forever captured as holy man, healer, and champion of the weak in the hagiographical *Life* of his disciple, Sulpicius Severus; or Rufinus (c. 345–411), erstwhile friend of Jerome, monk, historian, and producer of an important range of Latin translations of Greek texts, many of which would otherwise be lost. We have also had to say far too little about a host of less prominent individuals – poets, ascetics, minor preachers, and, above all, women – whose input to the church's development was far more profound than any summary plot-line can possibly imply. Of course, the overwhelming majority of voices from what we tend (alas) to label 'the ordinary Christians' are lost to us, but the story of even those which are not must be told elsewhere. All are part of the West's inheritance. What we have traced here is only the work of the few, those who wrote the programmatic chapters for the narrative which would subsequently unfold. Their bequest is but the starting-point for a larger understanding of an even more complex sequel.

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CREEDS, COUNCILS AND DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT



Trevor Hart

That Christianity is a tradition of faith and life which is 'credal' is a claim which is easily demonstrated. It is, though, a claim which bears several distinct layers of meaning, and an understanding of its truth with respect to our period demands some careful disentangling of these. In this chapter we shall explore the senses in which early Christianity was 'credal', paying attention to the occasions for, and the nature and development of, emergent confessional formulae in the church. As we shall see, 'creeds' in the proper sense of fixed declaratory formulae 'summarizing the essential articles of . . . religion and enjoying the sanction of ecclesiastical authority' (Kelly 1972: 1) were born well into the period with which we are concerned, but their conception and gestation may be traced in 'credal' antecedents of various sorts reaching as far back as our sources for the history of Christianity will take us. Consideration of more developed credal forms will of necessity entail some account of those local and ecumenical councils of bishops and other clergy¹ which, as a vital part of the process whereby Christian 'doctrine' or 'dogma' developed and came to be expressed and defined, were instrumental in the drafting and interpretation of confessional formulae of various sorts. Finally we shall inquire briefly into the pattern of doctrinal development in the early centuries, and consider some quite different views of the relationship between developed credal orthodoxy and its biblical roots.

Before embarking on our study, it is worth pausing to define some terms which, while widely used in discussions of our overall topic, are often used variously. We have already borrowed a helpful working definition of 'creed'. In speaking generally of 'credal' formulae, however, we intend here a much wider range of reference, embracing any coherent, seemingly stylized and established formulations of belief, however brief or flexible these might be. Such might include, for example, ejaculatory liturgical confessions (e.g., 'Jesus is Lord'), extracts from hymns, or more sustained and comprehensive (but not necessarily fixed and formally sanctioned) summaries of belief.

The word 'dogma', or 'dogmas', is often used in modern treatments of our theme.² This word is closely related to but often distinguished from 'doctrine'. So, for example, Jaroslav Pelikan defines Christian 'doctrine' helpfully as 'What the church of Jesus Christ believes, teaches, and confesses on the basis of the word of God'

(Pelikan 1971: 1). This description has a number of advantages. It emphasizes the close connection between doctrine and the scriptural heritage of the church. As we shall see, while other factors were always involved, most of the doctrinal disputes and developments in the early centuries arose directly out of questions about the proper exegesis of biblical texts. Pelikan's definition also draws attention to the ecclesial parameters of doctrine. As another writer has it, 'Doctrine presupposes the existence of the church . . . A community of faith which confesses Jesus Christ as Lord' (McGrath 1990: 12). Doctrine is a social phenomenon in at least two senses: first, in that it is that which is believed, taught and confessed not just *within* a particular community (individual members of a community may hold and espouse non-representative views) but *by* that community as such; and second, therefore, in the sense that it functions to mark and reinforce the boundaries of this particular community. Thus 'the confessors of one and the same dogma form a community' (Harnack 1894: 14). Here, though, we run into our other word, 'dogma'. Is this the same as 'doctrine' or something different? When dogma is differentiated from doctrine it is so usually as a sub-category of it. Keeping close to Pelikan's definition we may say that dogma is that which the church formally confesses in its declaratory creeds. 'Ordinarily "dogma" . . . stands for those formulations of Christian doctrine which have obtained authoritative recognition in wide sections of the Church and are embodied in historical creeds' (Orr 1901: 12). Thus 'All dogma may be doctrine; not all doctrine, however, is dogma' (McGrath 1990: 9) since things may be and are believed and taught by the church which for one reason or another have never been subjected to any widely agreed credal formulation.³

Finally we may distinguish the word 'theology' from all the above. This word may simply refer to that intellectual process of reflection in which the church is rooted and feeds back into the formulation of doctrine and dogma. But theology as such is not bound to this process of reception and transmission of Christian tradition. Theology may also perform critical or exploratory roles, and as such may be pursued by thinkers who are not part of the Christian community of faith, or (thinking of the period we are concerned with) by those whose views fell foul of or trespassed beyond the consensus of Catholic teaching and confession. Another way of defining theology, then, might be to think of it as designating the privately entertained views and investigations of individual theologians who, as such, may or may not be committed to these views. Correspondingly, 'The community is not committed to the ideas of its theologians: such commitment would restrict their freedom to speculate, to explore, to criticize' (McGrath 1990: 11).

CHRISTIANS: PEOPLE OF THE FORMULARY?

'Christianity is the only major religion to set such store by creeds and doctrines' (Young 1991: 1). To the extent that this is true it must be very carefully qualified if we are properly to understand the origin and nature of credal elements in the Christian tradition. It certainly must not be taken to mean that Christianity is essentially a system of ideas to be learned and 'believed' (i.e. granted intellectual assent), ideas conveniently listed in its various creeds and confessions. This mistake

has often been made (in the modern period it has furnished the basis for some significant theological schools) and is lent undeniable support by the expression and apparent emphasis of some credal formulae themselves.

The so-called Athanasian Creed⁴ is perhaps the most obvious example. Often referred to simply as the *Quicunque vult* after its opening phrase ('Whosoever would be saved'), this extensive formula has enjoyed widespread and regular exposure in the Christian West through its incorporation in Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Anglican liturgies. In fact it is not a creed at all in the normal sense: it lacks the familiar declaratory formula 'I believe' or 'we believe', offers a far more comprehensive and rigorously analytical account of the doctrines of Trinity and incarnation than any other creed ever attempts to do, and lacks the narrative focus which we shall see to be typical of the classical creeds and which roots them vitally in the soil of scripture. This 'creed' is, in fact, a short systematic theological treatise unpacking the finer points of the doctrines of God and of Jesus Christ. As such, it is certainly 'credal' in our wider sense. In purporting to present 'the Catholic Faith: which except a man do faithfully and stedfastly believe, he cannot be saved', however, the formulary gives all the wrong impressions when read in isolation.

Of course the ideas which the *Quicunque vult* contains are very important. Ideas generally are important within Christianity; but their importance is not primary, as the object in which faith is invested. They are important as tools which enable the meaning and significance of faith's true object to be grasped, worked out and articulated in ways which facilitate the living of Christian life and the shaping of Christian identity. In the case of this particular text we are dealing with a relatively recondite philosophical discussion, carried on at a level of considerable abstraction from that to which the ideas contained in it properly pertain. The shape and content of Christian faith are determined by its roots, not in a set of ideas but in a particular history or story – a series of events in the interpretation of which by faith God's identity, character and engagement with humankind are known. This history begins with God's calling of Abraham, continues through the centuries of Israel's life in covenant with this God, reaches a climax in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, and continues in the day to day life of the church beyond Pentecost. It is through the telling and retelling of this story that the God who is its central character is encountered and known. It is from the plot of this story, and by becoming part of it, that Christian faith is nourished and grows. But the story has to be interpreted and made sense of, both in terms of its own coherence and logic (just as literary critics analyse the plot or characterization of a novel or play) and in terms of its relationship to other things which, as intelligent human beings, we believe and know. It is here that more abstract sorts of analysis enter in, storytelling giving way to classification and precise definition.

Remaining with the *Quicunque vult* as our example, we might think of it as an example of second-order discourse mapping rules for the parameters of properly Christian speech and thought about God and Jesus Christ. These rules are derived initially from an interpretation of the biblical text. They pertain to what are held within the church to be proper and improper ways of reading this text. Thus, having been derived from the biblical story they are subsequently regulative of the reading of this same story within the community of faith. They seek to prohibit unitarian,

tritheistic, subordinationist and other misreadings of the plot. But in order to understand them at all, therefore, we must set them directly alongside that story itself. Read in isolation from it they appear mere dry and bloodless formulae, the product of some exotic academic algebra derived from the philosophical schools. Such a reading tells us nothing about why the ideas found here are important. For those who formulated them, though, they were about faithfulness to the shape of the gospel itself and, therefore, the shaping of a Christian identity rooted in that gospel. As with the rules to any game, if we would understand what difference they make, we really have to read them alongside an actual playing of the game. In this case that means relating them to their biblical and experiential roots in the life of the community of faith.

Even this most abstract and philosophical of doctrinal formularies, then, is anything but evidence of Christianity as a belief system or set of sharply defined logical precepts comparable to Confucianism, Platonism, and various other -isms. The merest glance at some of the classical creeds (let alone their earlier credal counterparts) reveals an altogether different atmosphere in which the inseparable link between Christian doctrines and the messy contingencies of history is much more apparent. Born, suffered, died, was raised, will come again; the core of these formulae is always the same, tying Christian identity resolutely to the facts of God's engagement with us as interpreted out of the scriptures. Apart from this series of 'facts' there is no abiding system of 'true' beliefs. The church stands and falls with this story: it has no set of timeless and universal precepts to fall back upon. The further back we go, the more obvious this becomes.

APOSTLES' CREEDS?

For many centuries it was supposed that the basic elements of Christian belief had been identified and handed on to the church in a fixed and authoritative version by the apostles themselves. The tradition is an ancient one, first referred to in a document from the early fifth century where it is already appealed to as an established story. Before setting out to proclaim the story of what God had done in Jesus Christ, it was maintained, the twelve had first abstracted from that same story its vital points and cast them into a brief, easily remembered summary for the purposes of teaching and refuting error within the church, thereby guaranteeing a degree of Catholic consistency in the preaching of the gospel throughout the world.⁵ The allegedly resultant 'Apostles' Creed' has traditionally been identified with one of the most familiar and significant of those formularies, which have endured within regular liturgical use in the West:

I believe in God the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth;
And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born from the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, dead, and buried,
descended into hell,
on the third day rose again from the dead,
ascended to heaven,
sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty,
thence He will come to judge the living and the dead;
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the remission of sins;
the resurrection of the flesh,
and eternal life. Amen.

(Text adapted from Kelly 1972: 369)

We might pause to note in passing the narrative structure referred to above. Each of the articles of this formulary can be linked directly to episodes from the story told in the Christian Bible, a fact which lends *prima facie* credence to the idea of its apostolic origin. Such a creed, were it to be authentic, would have to be deemed highly authoritative and granted considerable prestige even by those nervous about granting too much weight to church 'tradition' alongside scripture as a source and norm in the shaping of Christian faith and life. This was doubtless the chief motive behind the emergence of the legend which, in its more elaborate versions, has each of the 12 apostles making his own personal theological contribution to the piece under the immediate influence of the Pentecostal Spirit.⁶ But it is a legend, and was properly recognized as such as early as the fifteenth century. The formula which we know as the Apostles' Creed is in fact identifiable as 'a rather elaborate variant' of a baptismal creed originating in the Roman church no earlier than the late second century (Kelly 1972: 369; cf. 126–30), and is itself unlikely to have reached its present fixed form until much later (the earliest textual evidence dates from the early eighth century, although Kelly observes that creeds 'practically identical' with it can be found from the fifth century onwards). Yet while the ascription of this creed (or its progenitors) to the apostles has little to commend it to the historian, it is not quite so gross an anachronism as modern histories of doctrine have sometimes suggested. We know that the apostles did not draft it; but there is nothing in it which they could and would not have affirmed if we may take their writings as a reliable gauge (a claim which, as we shall see, cannot be made in any straightforward manner of some other declaratory creeds such as the 'Nicene'); and, if fully fledged summaries of this sort were a much later development in the church's life, the suggestion that the 'credal' spirit itself was altogether alien to the apostolic age is one which must be challenged at its roots.

The Christian church was born out of the events surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. That it was something far more dynamic and untidy than a belief system is apparent from even the most cursory reading of the New Testament; but that certain key beliefs were inextricably woven into its texture is equally clear. The belief that Jesus was risen from death, that he was God's promised Messiah, that he had died for the sins of the

world, that he was himself appropriately to be spoken of and worshipped as 'the Lord', these post-resurrection convictions lay at the core of the earliest Christian preaching, praying and praising. They were made sense of in relation to the story which Israel told about her God ('the Lord'), but required a rupturing and reshaping of that story in ways which made its Christian version quite distinctive and problematic for most Jews. Christians, we must say, from the first understood themselves of necessity as the bearers and stewards of a unique and surprising story, a story set over against both paganism and Judaism, and a story with life-changing capacities. It was in their telling and living of this same story that Christian identity ('the church') was fashioned. It is not surprising, therefore, that the key characters and events in this story were held to be vitally important. To read the New Testament is to be confronted by these at every turn.

While there is no unvarying and comprehensive shopping-list of essential 'beliefs' such as we find in later declaratory creeds, the epistles in particular are littered with short confessional ('credal') statements. Some of these may be fragments of actual liturgies, hymns or other stylized confessions from the early church's pattern of life, but the criteria for identifying these are difficult to establish with any degree of certainty. One which, due both to the frequency of its appearance and its centrality to the distinctive core of Christian identity, clearly reflects 'public' rather than private profession is the short and simple declaration *Kyrios Christos*, 'Jesus is Lord' (see, e.g., Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11; Col. 2:6; cf. also stylized references to 'the Lord Jesus Christ', e.g. Acts 11:17, 20; Rom. 1:7; 'our Lord Jesus Christ', e.g., Rom. 1:4; 7:25). Closely related are the ascriptions to Jesus of the title 'Son of God' (see, e.g., Rom. 1:4; Heb. 4:14; 1 John 4:15; 5:5, 13; cf. Matt. 4:6; Mark 3:11) and 'the Christ' (e.g., 1 John 2:22; Mark 8:30; cf. Acts 2:36) to which the ubiquitous composite form 'Jesus Christ' bears eloquent if often overlooked witness. These short titular formulae each bear a hidden freight of meaning which we cannot begin to unpack here, but which tells of his unique place in the story of God's redemptive dealings with humankind through the people of Israel. In addition to these and other short confessions or catch-phrases (e.g., 1 Thess. 4:14, 'Jesus died and rose again'; 1 Peter 1:21, 'God, who has raised [Jesus] from the dead'; cf. Rom. 8:11; Eph. 1:20), scholars regularly identify more sustained 'creed-like' passages in the biblical text which seem likely to reflect the presence behind the text of a developed 'stereotyped in-language' (Young 1991: 8), formulae or strings of phrases which would have been familiar to the writers and their original readers. These include Rom. 1:3ff.; 4:24; 8:34; 1 Cor. 8:6; 15:3ff.; 1 Tim. 2:5f.; 3:16; 6:13f.; 2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Pet. 3:18ff.⁷ Citation in full of just two of these will suffice to illustrate the point being made:

I handed on to you as of first importance
what I in turn had received:
that Christ died for our sins
according to the scriptures,
and that he was buried,
and that he was raised on the third day
in accordance with the scriptures,

and that he appeared to Cephas,
then to the twelve.
Then he appeared to more than
five hundred brothers and sisters at one time,
some of whom are still alive,
though some have died . . .

(1 Cor. 15:3–6)

For there is one God;
there is also one mediator
between God and
humankind,
Christ Jesus, himself human,
who gave himself a ransom for all. . .

(1 Tim. 2:5)

The first of these two passages is explicitly introduced by Paul as something which had been ‘handed on’ to him as being of ‘first importance’. This could simply mean that the information in it was second hand, since Paul himself had not been a witness of the events spoken of; but it reinforces the possibility that we are dealing with a piece of formulaic *traditio*, oral or written, which the apostle is citing more or less precisely. Setting either of these passages alongside the Apostles’ Creed it is not difficult to see why some scholars wish to see them as primitive ‘creeds’ or fragments of ‘creeds’, albeit of a much more flexible and unofficial sort than those which eventually followed them.

The least we can say about the New Testament period is that in it there was a body of teaching about Jesus and his place in God’s story which was distinctive to the church (‘the gospel’ or ‘the faith’), which consisted in the story of Israel now radically modified in accordance with certain beliefs about Jesus, which was held to be essential to if not determinative of Christian identity, which was familiar in its broad outlines to most if not all Christians (so much so that it is never spelled out in full but only alluded to in the New Testament writings), which was therefore held to be the shared ‘public’ property of the church as a whole rather than the private views of particular individuals or parties (though these obviously also existed and were also important), and which is reflected in the sorts of slogans, catch-phrases and brief narrative summaries listed above. To return to a point made earlier, attempts to identify the sum and overall shape of this ‘tradition’ bear more than a passing resemblance to the narrative summaries of later declaratory creeds (not least the Apostles’ Creed). Attempts to posit a fundamental gulf between the casts of mind of ‘the world of Syrian peasants and Greek philosophy’, and to identify this with a difference between a primitive ‘simple’, primarily religious and ethical, and a later ‘dogmatic’, creed-ridden Christianity, therefore, will hardly hold water, and will need to be qualified beyond the point where they are of any serious use. ‘Religion without theology is like a body without a skeleton: it lacks that which stiffens and steadies it; it becomes flabby and weak and sentimental’ (Richardson 1935: 8). Accordingly, Christianity has from its roots been ‘credal’, concerned with a story which it has told in order to make sense of the world, which it holds to be true, and

which can be and has been articulated in more or less complex, lengthy and flexible verbal formulae. The occasions in the life of the apostolic church for the casting and use of such formularies would have been various: preaching; healings and exorcisms 'in the name of Jesus'; the preparation of candidates for baptism; baptism itself; celebration of the Eucharist; hymns and other liturgical materials; all these and other regular circumstances would have lent themselves to the use of familiar, widely accepted but as yet flexible verbal formulae articulating the heart of the community's distinctive *credo*.

READING THE SCRIPTURES RIGHTLY WITHIN THE CHURCH

It need not be doubted that a variety of social contexts continued to influence the shape and content of 'credal' formulae in the church in the wake of the apostolic era. So, for example, in the body of writings (dating from the late first and early second centuries) generally referred to as the 'Apostolic Fathers', we find 'an abundance of quasi-credal scraps which show that the creed-making impulses of the Christian communities were alive and active' (Kelly 1972: 66), scraps deriving from or relating to liturgical, pedagogical, therapeutic, evangelistic and other circumstances. But two particular concerns began increasingly to dominate the process in which the genesis of declaratory creeds is to be traced. Both were closely tied to the specific needs of a missionary church facing the challenge of evermore diverse cultural and religious receptor communities.

Christianity had begun life within the embrace of a Judaism which quickly eschewed it; yet the first believers in the Christ/Messiah were of Jewish stock and remained for some while within the traditions of their parent religion, a situation which created considerable tensions and the painful forging of a distinctly Christian identity as the New Testament makes clear. When it emerged, however, this identity was still essentially related to the story told in the Jewish Scriptures and could not adequately be understood or modelled apart from this socio-religious matrix. This is clear enough from the fact that even after they had been expelled from synagogue and temple precincts, Christians retained the Hebrew Bible as their own book (it would eventually become their 'Old Testament') and thought of themselves as the true heirs to Israel's promises and responsibilities under God.

The missionary expansion of the church into Asia Minor, the Far East, Africa and Europe, which had begun in the first few decades and accelerated as the first century came to its close, quickly presented a practical difficulty which became more acute with every step that was taken away from these Jewish roots and soil. The presence of gentile 'converts' for whom the Jewish tradition was at first a closed book presented a significant threat to Christian identity. In this respect the church's success could easily have been its own undoing as the proportion of such biblically illiterate neophytes grew ever larger. Telling the story of Jesus the Messiah to Jews was one thing. Telling it to those who had never heard of the Lord, let alone his Messiah, was another altogether. It seems likely that public readings of the church's founding texts formed an important part of its worship and pedagogy, as in Judaism.

How was such a complex body of literature, even in translation, to be made accessible to aural recipients for whom this was foreign and unknown, who had no prior acquaintance with the plots, characters, heroes, contexts? How could they 'follow' a text, presumably read piecemeal according to some kind of lectionary system? How would they retain a sense of direction and overview as each extract was heard?

(Young 1997: 17).

Failure to understand the story in appropriate ways, missing out on the vital literary context which enabled it to be heard aright, would undermine the integrity of the gospel itself and thereby eventually erode that Christian identity which is rooted in and nurtured by its symbolic world.

One second-century theologian who wrestled at length with this problem was Irenaeus of Lyons. In his treatise *Adversus Haereses* (*Against Heresies*) he complains of those who cite the text but 'disregard the order and the connection of the scriptures' and thereby 'dismember and destroy the truth' (1.8.1; Donaldson and Roberts 1887: 326). Irenaeus has in mind here people (the so-called Valentinians) who, he alleges, deliberately do this in order to mislead and to delude; but the problem, whether deliberately or accidentally induced, is the same one. To tear the story of Jesus out of its proper literary context within the organic whole of scripture, to substitute some other framework of meaning for this one, could only spell disaster for the attempt to secure continuity of identity in the task of handing-on this story. Irenaeus' resort is to something which he refers to variously as the 'rule of faith', the 'rule of the truth', 'the tradition', or simply 'the faith'. The word for rule here is *canona*, used ordinarily to designate the measuring rod which a builder might use. So the image is that of a tool with which to gauge the 'Christianness' of an interpretation or a practice allegedly rooted in scripture. From various contexts in which Irenaeus renders the content of this 'rule' (e.g., in 1.10.1 and 4.33.7) it is apparent that it is not a particular fixed form of words to which he is referring, but rather a broad narrative pattern, derived from scripture as a whole, which Irenaeus takes for granted as familiar to his readers (as the 'public' possession of the church everywhere), and which he assumes has been handed on from generation to generation since the apostolic age. Formulations rendering this pattern, albeit brief and flexible, were intended to fill out the context for readings of the biblical text appropriate to the nurture of Christian identity.

They provided . . . the proper reading of the beginning and the ending, the focus of the plot and the relations of the principal characters, so enabling the 'middle' to be heard in bits as meaningful. They provided the 'closure' which contemporary theory prefers to leave open. They articulated the essential hermeneutical key without which texts and community would disintegrate in incoherence.

(Young 1997: 21).

That this notion of a 'rule' or, we might say, rules for properly Christian readings of scripture was widespread in the church is clear from its presence in the near contemporary writings of Irenaeus (France), Tertullian (North Africa)⁸ and Origen (Egypt).⁹

INTERROGATION AND DECLARATION: THE LINK WITH BAPTISM

This hermeneutical concern relates chiefly to contexts in which scripture was continuously read and interpreted within the life of the congregation. In terms of shaping Christian identity, though, it was important that some basic spadework was done at the outset, as part of the process of evangelization and the initiation of converts into the community. It is here that we find the second main situation in the life of the church which offered a natural context for the generation and regular use of credal formulae of one sort or another. In fact it seems that these two contexts were always genetically related: the *traditio* to which Irenaeus appeals in refuting 'false teachings' and 'blasphemous' interpretations of scripture is one which, he suggests, all Christians received 'by means of baptism' (1.9.4; Donaldson and Roberts 1887: 330). In other words, by one means or another, the content of the 'rule of faith' was handed on to those who presented themselves as candidates for Christian initiation.

It used to be supposed that such fixed declaratory formulae as the Apostles' Creed and the Constantinopolitan Creed¹⁰ belonged to a type originating in the liturgical setting of Christian baptism. So, for example, the German church historian Hans Leitzmann held that 'It is indisputable that the root of all creeds is the formula of belief pronounced by the baptizand, or pronounced in his hearing and assented to by him, before his baptism.'¹¹ While this supposition has a *prima facie* simplicity and attractiveness (it is easy to imagine a formula which opens with 'I believe. . .' being drafted for just this liturgical purpose), study of the relevant sources does not bear it out. In fact, while declaratory creeds have certainly held a prominent position in western liturgies since the sixth century, the first clear evidence of any liturgical use whatsoever dates from the fourth century (when declaratory creeds were already an established and familiar phenomenon), and here the secondary importance of such formulae is quite clear. There was indeed a central credal focus for the baptismal event, but it was of another, different sort.

It is natural that some explicit profession of faith should have formed part of Christian initiatory ritual from the earliest times. If anything is clear from the New Testament it is that Christian identity is closely bound up with belief of a certain sort and in certain key doctrines. The pattern attaching to water baptism appears ordinarily to have entailed 'faith', the particular manifestation of this faith in an attitude of repentance, and the use of 'the name' of Jesus. It is likely that the most common form of liturgical use of this name had a Christological focus. In the longer reading of Acts 8:36–8 a short credal formula of this sort is placed directly on the lips of the baptismal candidate, but other uses of 'the name' (for example in the context of exorcisms and healings) suggest that it may have been equally if not more common for the one baptizing to pronounce it. It is somewhat misleading to suggest, as some have, that short Christological uses of the name represent a more simple, and therefore more logically and temporally primitive, pattern of baptismal utterance. That explicitly 'Trinitarian' formulations were also normal in and close on the heels of the apostolic era is clear from Matt. 28.19 and from evidence furnished by chapter 7 of the *Didache* which details an explicitly Trinitarian liturgical practice,

urging either a threefold immersion in 'running' water, or a threefold pouring of water on the head of the baptismal candidates, 'in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit'.¹² In reality, though, this threefold name entails little more than a teasing out of what is already implicit in a passage such as Acts 19:5–7, where the baptismal ascription of 'Lordship' to Jesus is linked closely to an account of the outpouring of the Spirit. Here, as elsewhere in the New Testament, we find language used in ways which, while they in no way reflect the later developed conceptuality of God as three-in-one and one-in-three, none the less do reflect a basic 'concern to include Jesus, as well as the Spirit, in Jewish monotheistic faith in God' (Bauckham 1993: 24) by including them with God (a term usually reserved for the Father of Jesus) on the 'divine' side of the Creator–creature relation.

Clear evidence for this threefold credal structure in baptismal liturgy and ritual action continues to be found, for example, in the mid-second century and the first *Apology* of Justin Martyr,¹³ and in the early third century with Tertullian's treatise *Against Praxeas*.¹⁴ It is with a close contemporary of Tertullian, though, that we learn something highly significant about the precise form which this 'Trinitarian credo', around which Christian baptism was structured, had by now assumed. The *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus,¹⁵ dating from the early part of the third century, presents as an already established practice in the Roman church an interrogation and response model of baptism. The relevant passage is worth citing:

And when he who is being baptized goes down into the water, he who baptizes him, putting his hand on him, shall say thus:

Dost thou believe in God, the Father Almighty?

And he who is being baptized shall say:

I believe.

Then, holding his hand on his head, he shall baptize him once.

And then he shall say:

Dost thou believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was dead and buried, and rose again the third day, alive from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the quick and the dead?

And when he says:

I believe

he is baptized again. And again he shall say:

Dost thou believe in the Holy Ghost, and the holy church, and the resurrection of the flesh?

He who is being baptized shall say accordingly:

I believe,

and so he is baptized a third time.

(trans. in Easton 1934: 46–7)

Whereas many modern-day baptismal liturgies incorporate an interrogative pattern alongside the recital of a creed, here it is the creed itself which assumes this form. What can be seen at a glance is that the articles assented to can easily be reassembled and recast to resemble a creed of the more familiar declaratory type. While it may well be possible to trace the existence of such a parallel formula behind

Hippolytus' account (see, e.g., Kelly 1972: 91), what is of importance for our purposes is its signal absence from his account of baptismal practice as such. It is the ancient threefold structure of the Trinitarian name, with the prominent second article duly filled out with relevant narrative detail, which has shaped the content of this interrogation. Its regular use in public liturgy would tend inevitably in the direction of verbal fixity rather than the fluidity which we saw to characterize other primitive credal formulae, and this no doubt contributed to the emergence and shape of official declaratory creeds as we know them.

What, then, are we to think about the relationship between this interrogative credal model and the declaratory version which eventually superseded it in baptismal practice? If Kelly is correct (Kelly 1972: 127) then we may have to reckon with the existence of a formal, relatively fixed declaratory formula in the Roman church as early as the latter half of the second century. Our earliest evidence for the baptismal *interrogationes de fide* (i.e. Hippolytus' account which is subsequently confirmed in a variety of sources) refers us to a similar period, but it seems likely (and is certainly possible) that this model reaches back earlier than this. It is sometimes suggested that accounts such as that of Justin presuppose or imply it. There is no reason why they should not, but no particular reason for asserting that they do. What can probably be said with confidence is that the declaratory model did not precede the interrogative, but grew up alongside it and under its shaping influence. Its emergence is likely to be directly related to the latter's centrality in the baptismal context, and an ecclesial need to adapt its contents for situations in which the dramatic back-and-forth of interrogation was less appropriate.

We began this section by questioning the genesis of declaratory creeds in baptismal liturgical contexts. We may now qualify this slightly, and say that such creeds appear to have originated in close connection with baptism, albeit not as part of the liturgy as such. Rather, their origin seems to have been as learning aids within the lengthy and careful catechetical preparation of candidates for baptism. We know from Cyril of Jerusalem's *Catechetical Lectures* that in the middle of the fourth century catechumens in the church at Jerusalem were given doctrinal and moral instruction throughout the period of Lent, and that a declaratory creed was formally delivered or handed over (the *traditio symboli*) to them for committal to memory during the fifth or sixth week. Apparently this *symbolum* was formally kept secret from them up to this point, and had now to be learned by heart; they were not permitted to write it down. This same formula, once learned, was then 'rendered back' in public by candidates during the baptismal liturgy itself on Easter Eve and, other evidence suggests, probably in a separate, pre-baptismal ceremony of *redditio* or 'rendering' on Palm Sunday (Kelly 1972: 33–4). Similar patterns can be traced in accounts of catechetical practice from other episcopal sees in the same period (Jones *et al.* 1983: 98–9).

It seems reasonable to suppose the chief function of creeds of this declaratory type in earlier periods (when, as we have seen, there is no evidence of their presence within the baptismal liturgy itself), therefore, to have been a catechetical one. Even when they do eventually appear as part of the event of baptism itself, they do so in a manner which is precisely suggestive of the completion of catechesis, and the readiness of the candidates to move on to the sacrament itself. They do not belong

logically to the baptism as such, that is to say, but to the process which leads up to it. It is easy, then, to imagine a procedure in earlier generations in which a public 'rendering' of the creed, symbolic of the satisfactory completion of catechesis, preceded the occasion of baptism altogether, perhaps forming part of a distinct ceremony for the purpose. That declaratory creeds existed from the end of the second century onwards we know. That they had no central role in baptismal liturgy until the fourth century we also know. The ascription to them of an origin in baptismal catechesis, therefore, seems best to fit with what we know. The convention of *traditio* and *redditio* emerged during the third century as part of a significant and widespread bolstering of catechetical procedures designed to secure Christian identity from the possible destabilizing effects of a flood of pagan converts. Henceforth all those admitted to membership of the Christian community must at least be capable of identifying themselves by this means. The advent of such a convention, though, required the use of some agreed formula which could be 'handed over' and 'rendered back'. The declaratory creed performed this function. As succinct narrative formulae in which the key elements of Christian belief are efficiently summarized, such creeds lent themselves exactly to a circumstance in which converts must quickly acquire the relevant markers of Christian identity. The declaratory *credo* is fitted precisely to answer the hypothetical question '*what* do you believe?; what is it that is distinctive to being a Christian?' In providing a usable summary of the doctrinal core of Christian faith (we know that some bishops effectively lectured on its articles in preparing their candidates for baptism), the creed thus also equipped all new believers and members of the Christian church with the wherewithal to identify themselves as such.

As Kelly observes, 'the circumstances of its use by the bishop and of its being memorized and solemnly rehearsed by the catechumens were such as to surround [a declaratory creed] with immense prestige' (Kelly 1972: 100). Whatever credal form was adopted for catechetical use by a local bishop would, therefore, quickly have been adopted by all Christians in that region as an authoritative guide to Christian identity and, although there may as yet have been no *absolute* insistence on the inviolability of the precise wording, a basic verbal fixity can be assumed. At this stage, then, we must think in terms of a host of local creeds bearing a more or less strong family resemblance and enjoying a more or less 'official' status. The prominent role of the Roman see in the western church resulted in a fairly strong resemblance between western creeds, many of which appear to be direct descendants of a creed which it had used since the late second century. In the East, however, there was no such ecclesiastical centre of gravity and local creeds grew up with a far greater measure of independence, resulting in much more evident variety in their precise content. Even here, though, an identifiable unity underlies the diversity, in particular a shared concern with the wider cosmic dimensions of and setting for the more 'historical' narrative drama upon which western creeds tend to focus.¹⁶ This can be seen by comparing an early fourth-century baptismal creed of the church in Caesarea with the Apostles' Creed (see pp. 639–40):

We believe in one God, the Father, almighty
maker of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ the Logos
of God, God from God, light from light,
life from life, Son only begotten,
first-begotten of all creation,
begotten before all ages from the Father,
through Whom all things came into being,
Who because of our salvation was incarnate,
and dwelt among men, and suffered,
and rose again on the third day,
and ascended to the Father,
and will come again to judge living and dead;
We believe also in the Holy Spirit.

(text from Kelly 1972: 182)

The sporadic nature of our knowledge of declaratory creeds in the third and fourth centuries derives in part from a convention which grew up and flourished during this same period. Often referred to in scholarship as the 'arcane discipline', this was essentially the deliberate inculcation and preservation of an aura of mystery surrounding the sacraments of the church in particular, the Lord's Prayer, and also (presumably by virtue of its close connection with baptism) the creed. The symbolic heart of Christian identity was, as it were, to be opened up only to those who would commit themselves to the way of discipleship. Hence the insistence upon oral transmission and commission to memory of credal formulae, and the refusal of Cyril of Jerusalem, in explaining the theology of the creed to his hearers, actually to cite its text directly. This ethos of secrecy is widespread in this period, providing a stark contrast to earlier insistences (in Irenaeus' and Tertullian's writings for example) upon the essentially public nature of catholic truth (as crystallized in the 'rule of faith') by comparison with the 'secret gnosis' appealed to by various heterodox groups.¹⁷ The claim that the identity of the church (together with its attendant symbols and rites) was continuous with that of the apostolic era rested squarely on an alleged visible succession not only of personnel (bishops) but of the message which it proclaimed and embodied. The arcane discipline seems to have been tied quite closely to the development of the catechumenate as a phenomenon, and correspondingly faded in the late fourth century as the latter gave way to the establishment of infant baptism as the norm rather than the exception within the church. This same shift in practice seems likely to have been responsible for the declaratory creed finding its way more regularly into the liturgy proper. With its catechetical function largely gone, this was a natural enough alternative home for it.

At the same time, however, circumstances within the church's life were creating a new and distinctive role for the declaratory creed, a role still closely related to issues of Christian identity, but now within a context more political than pastoral.

CREEDS, SYNODS AND COUNCILS

The third century witnessed considerable political and social upheaval in the empire, and this had a concomitant impact upon the growing Christian church. Christians were widely viewed with suspicion as potentially destabilizing elements in society, and the church became a repeated target for political scapegoating and official persecution. To be a Christian was to be different, to fail to be 'one of us', and thereby to attract attention of an unwelcome and hostile sort. This social circumstance is reflected clearly enough in the preoccupation with 'belonging', arcane symbols and boundary markers which characterize relevant Christian texts from the period. The conversion of the emperor Constantine in 312 (see the profile of Constantine in Chapter 42 of this volume), however, heralded the advent of an altogether different relationship between church and state, and a corresponding distinct set of challenges for the maintenance of authentic Christian identity. Constantine not only called a halt to the treatment of Christians as social pariahs, he effectively rendered Christianity fashionable and respectable – a fact which led duly to an influx of 'the half-converted, the socially ambitious and the ill-instructed' through the church's doors (Richardson 1935: 49). At the same time, Constantine himself became actively involved in sponsoring the building of churches and the payment of the clergy, and adjudicated directly in disputes between various ecclesial parties. Thus, as one account has it, 'the Empire was . . . drawn into the Church as well as the Church into the Empire' (Hall 1991: 119).

Constantine was careful wherever possible to forge positive political relationships with bishops, and thereby to harness the bureaucratic structures of *ecclesia* to work together with those of empire. When, therefore, a serious theological dispute (that associated with the name of Arius) flared up in the Egyptian city of Alexandria and soon threatened to divide the Eastern church, he intervened directly and convened a council of more than three hundred bishops from all over the Christianized world in order to seek a resolution. The council was held in the town of Nicaea (in modern-day Turkey) and, after lengthy and vigorous deliberations, produced a statement of faith or 'creed' which was designed not simply to reaffirm a long-standing orthodoxy, but to define that orthodoxy more precisely, and in doing so explicitly to exclude those who could not or would not now subscribe to it.

This idea of an episcopal synod framing credal declarations for church-political ends was not entirely new. It had, in fact, been practised very recently when, early in 325, a council of 59 bishops met in Antioch to fill the vacant see there, and took the opportunity to discuss and pronounce upon the Arian problem which had by now spread from Alexandria and was already a cause of dispute between clergy and bishops in dioceses throughout Asia Minor. They drafted a long and comprehensive statement of faith, which they subsequently circulated throughout the empire (see Stevenson 1977: 354–7). This, though, was a local response to the controversy and, although it appears to have received fairly widespread support even in the western church, its statements were none the less possessed only of a local authority. The situation was quite different at Nicaea. Here there were bishops present from every part of the church, so that decisions taken and statements promulgated were possessed of ecumenical warrant and truly catholic authority. In addition, the Nicene

documents had the full weight of imperial support, for Constantine saw doctrinal and spiritual unity as an important facilitator of the wider social cohesion of empire. The Nicene creed was, in his eyes, precisely a convenient tool for the fashioning (where necessary the imposition) of such unity. The harsh and politically forceful anathemas with which it closed were certainly intended to be applied, and 'sounded a new note in the history of the Church as an institution' (Kelly 1972: 207). This, then, was a creed of a new sort; not designed primarily for the instruction of the faithful so much as the efficient identification and excommunication of the heterodox.

The text of the original Nicene Creed¹⁸ reads as follows:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, Only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father; God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate, was made man, suffered, and rose again the third day, ascended into heaven, and is coming to judge living and dead.

And in the Holy Spirit.

And those who say, 'There was when he was not', and 'Before his generation he was not', and 'he came to be from nothing', or those who pretend that the Son of God is of other reality (*hypostasis*) or being (*ousia*) or alterable or mutable, the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes.

(text from Hall 1991: 130)

In both what it affirms and what it denies, the content of this creed is identifiably driven by the particular issues raised by Arius and his party (see the detailed discussion of Arianism in Chapter 38 of this volume). The basic issue can in fact be stated quite clearly: when the Bible refers to Jesus as the Son of God or the Word of God, does it mean that Jesus is God himself, personally present among us as a human being? Or is this 'Son of God' to be differentiated from rather than identified with God? The Arians insisted upon the latter view. The Son or Word referred to in the Bible, they urged, is not God himself, but a 'primary' creature, an angelic and exalted being, closer to God than any other, being himself responsible for creating everything else, yet himself having been created by God. Hence the logic of the Arian watchword 'there was when he was not'. It was a way of insisting that while God himself is eternal and without beginning, the Logos or Son has a beginning in the creative will of God, and is technically a creature, albeit a creature far exalted above others. It is somewhat misleading to see this way of reading the Bible as the result of any sudden or deliberate influx of extra-Christian influences, since it is certain that Arius was able to draw upon traditions within the church which had for some while pursued or permitted similar readings. Finally, though, it was an attempted accommodation with a doctrine of God incompatible in certain basic respects with that derived from scripture which caused the problem. The claim that

God (through his 'Son') is radically involved with his creation by entering into it in human form is basic to the Christian story. The meaning attaching to the word 'God' in Hellenic philosophical theology, however, will not permit this, since 'God' is radically transcendent in a way which excludes any direct contact with, let alone personal presence within, the world and its contingent history. Arius's Christology was not so much an attempt to belittle Jesus (he remains the incarnation of the most exalted spiritual being in the cosmos!) as to protect this view of God's radical transcendence. What Nicaea made clear was the theological watershed at stake here: either Jesus is God, or he isn't: there is no third way; and wholly divergent versions of Christianity arise from the choice made at this point. The problem, as those who opposed Arius in the debate saw, was that his attempt both to have his theological cake and eat it led directly to the abandonment of the most distinctive among Christianity's claims, removing God from direct involvement in the cross, in the ministry of Jesus, in the history of Israel, finally even in creation itself. The God of Arius, in other words, was a remote and unknown deity, and not the Father of Jesus Christ who so loved the world that he gave his only Son.

Knowing this much we can see at once how the credal formulary of Nicaea (especially in its own watchword, 'consubstantial with') is designed explicitly to exclude the Arian view and to secure the alternative reading. 'Son of God' refers to one who is to be directly identified with and as God in all that he does and says, and in all that happens to him. While the creed produced by this council in 325 can certainly be seen to rehearse key elements from the ancient catholic tradition, and may even be an elaboration of a much shorter independent baptismal creed used by the Jerusalem church (see Kelly 1972: 227f.), as it stands its concern is particular to the problem at hand. It is a distinctly *theological* creed in the sense of being a statement of faith shaped from first to last by a concern to exclude a particular set of doctrinal errors, and to offer a correspondingly more precise definition of orthodoxy with respect to certain articles of belief than had hitherto been available. It is also the first *dogmatic* creed. The Nicene Creed, in other words, did not simply *describe* in general terms 'that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all'; it *defined*, in very precise and henceforth officially unchangeable terms, what may count as orthodox Christian dogma. The decisions of this council, and its creed, are officially still binding on all Christians today.

The fourth and fifth centuries witnessed a flurry of synods and councils, rendered possible by the relative security and ease of travel afforded by the empire, and desirable by a continuing and seemingly never-ending need to clarify and articulate the nature of Christian orthodoxy. In fact, the process was effectively a self-perpetuating one, since most conciliar statements provoked further argument and dispute, thereby creating the conditions for others to follow in due course. This was certainly true of the ecumenical council at Nicaea which, far from achieving Constantine's goal of an imposed unity, actually sparked off a whole host of vigorous debates which may be traced through further ecumenical gatherings at Constantinople in 381 and Ephesus in 431 to their formal resolution by the Council of Chalcedon in 451.¹⁹ Unofficially, of course, the arguments continued long after this.

Councils did not only discuss doctrinal matters. Once convened, they took the

opportunity to pronounce on a whole host of very practical and ethical issues arising in the church's life, as the following extract from the canons of Nicaea makes clear:

If any one has been obliged to undergo a surgical operation from disease, or has been castrated by barbarians, let him continue in the clergy. But if any one in good health has so mutilated himself, it is right that, if he be enrolled amongst the clergy, he should cease from his ministrations; and that henceforth no such person should be promoted.

(text in Stevenson 1977: 358)

The primary function of councils, though, remained that of deliberating over key questions of belief and, in the case of ecumenical councils, pronouncing upon these in ways intended to be definitive for the shape of Christian identity. But definition is ever and always subject to the fragility and slipperiness of interpretation. To be able to recite with integrity the same formulary may be no guarantee of a shared doctrinal identity. The same words can mean different things to different people. Different words can mean the same thing. This is as true in the case of highly technical theological terms as it is in ordinary daily discourse. It is no surprise, therefore, to discover many of those whose views were formally proscribed by conciliar texts claiming that they had been misunderstood, while others, whose views were substantially remote from the intention of orthodoxy, were able none the less to affirm the particular form of words chosen to express that intention. With this decisive limitation placed upon the practical usefulness of 'defined orthodoxy', it is understandable that so great a theologian and bishop as Gregory of Nazianzus, at the very end of a long and distinguished career, should reflect as follows:

For my part, if I am to write the truth, my inclination is to avoid all assemblies of bishops, because I have never seen any council come to a good end, nor turn out to be a solution of evils. On the contrary, it usually increases them. You always find there love of contention and love of power . . . which beggar description; and, while sitting in judgment on others, a man might well be convicted of ill-doing himself long before he should put down the ill-doings of his opponents. So I retired into myself; and came to the conclusion that the only security for one's soul lies in keeping quiet.

(text in Stevenson 1966: 150)

No doubt this is an unduly jaundiced perspective; but it serves to remind us that creeds can at best have a partial role to play in the definition and maintenance of Christian identity. They may well be necessary, but they are hardly sufficient.

HOW DID DOCTRINE DEVELOP?

Our focus thus far has been largely upon the nature and development of credal forms in which Christian dogma found formal and authoritative expression in the early centuries. We have touched upon questions of the substance of Christian belief only tangentially. Yet it was not form alone that was subject to development with the passage of time. In terms of its content too Christian doctrine can be observed to

change as time passed and the gospel message was preached and reflected upon in changing intellectual and cultural contexts. The motives for such development included the need to relate Christian faith critically and positively to other beliefs (not least those held by people outside the church), the need to protect Christian identity by defining and then excluding heresy, and 'the desire of some Christians to think out and to think through the implications of their faith as deeply and as fully as possible' (Wiles 1967: 19). Such demands made it impossible for Christian faith to stand still; it was constantly forging new and different expressions of its message. Once this much is admitted, issues concerning the continuity of Christian identity quickly arise, and the significant question becomes *how* did it change? *What sort* of development may be identified? After all, 'The verb 'develop' has a range of meanings, including to unroll, to unfold, to lay open by degrees, to bring out what is latent or potential in, to bring to a more advanced or more highly organized state, to work out the potentialities of, to evolve, and to express in an expanded form' (Toon 1973: 8). It might even be stretched to include 'to mutate so as to become a quite different species'. So, how did doctrine develop?

One way to approach this question for our purposes would be to inquire how the Fathers themselves thought about it. As the effective stewards of such development we might reasonably expect them to have had some careful and well-informed view on the matter. We might also ask a different sort of question: how did doctrine *actually* develop? The assumption behind this question, largely shared by modern patristic scholarship, is that the Fathers themselves may not have been in the best position to *judge* the nature of doctrinal development for a variety of reasons, while we, 'by a patient study of the historical evidence' (Wiles 1967: 15) can see how things actually did develop.²⁰ There is no doubt an important truth here, but it is certainly a misleading way of putting things. It should be recast immediately thus: how do we, from our perspective informed by historical science, *believe* doctrine to have developed? For this formulation makes explicit what otherwise easily gets overlooked; namely, the fact that modern historical approaches to this question have themselves consistently been shaped by intellectual dogmas of one sort or another, and cannot crave anything like a complete objective detachment which sees how things 'actually' happened. More than one answer to the question remains possible.

The most eligible patristic exponent of a view of how doctrine develops is Vincent of Lérins whose *Commonitory* (c. 434) tackles precisely this theme at some length, and is often cited as representative of a view generally held (if not everywhere, always, and by all) until the rise of the critical 'history of dogma' approach in the late eighteenth century and the nineteenth. Vincent's concern is to identify some principle whereby he may distinguish catholic truth from heresy. His response is to appeal to what 'has been believed everywhere, always, by all' within the Catholic church (Vincent 1894: 132); in other words to the rule of faith. Heresy, therefore, Vincent defines in terms of *novelty*, the introduction, deliberate or otherwise, of what does not *belong* to the pattern of catholic truth. This has led to interpretations of him as an advocate of the idea that the substance of Christian doctrine is basically immutable, that it develops only in expression, as the same thing (i.e. that which 'has been believed everywhere, always and by all') is said in ever new ways for the purposes of clarification and enhanced communication.²¹ This view, if entertained, is

problematic. Expression and content cannot be separated so conveniently, since every new expression says more than, and to some extent other than, the original formulation.²² It is not, however, entirely clear that Vincent wished to draw this distinction in the crude manner sometimes attributed to him. A study of the key metaphors which he uses suggests a rather more complex account of the nature of continuity and novelty than such a distinction permits, and one which perhaps brings his account closer to some modern treatments of the question than has been allowed.

Vincent recognizes that there has been and must be development or growth in the Christian tradition, and this he likens to what occurs to the human body with the passage of time. He draws a vital distinction between progress and alteration. Hence, in terms of his biological metaphor, 'There is a wide difference between the flower of youth and the maturity of age; yet they who were once young are still the same now that they have become old, insomuch that though the stature and outward form of the individual are changed, yet his nature is one and the same, his person is one and the same' (Vincent 1894: 138). Clearly Vincent is seeking to maintain a balance between admitting 'wide difference' while yet insisting upon a continuity of identity. In some sense the person who, with the years, becomes bigger, stronger, wiser, is none the less identifiably the same person. The metaphor does not suggest a mere exchange of outward guise (a better image here, for example, might be the same person wearing several different costumes for appearances' sake), but rather genuine change (through growth) in the content of doctrine; yet not change of such a sort as would disrupt the basic pattern which constitutes identity.

Biological metaphors also commended themselves in various ways to many nineteenth-century commentators on the development of doctrine, writing, as they were, in the heyday of evolutionary theories of one sort or another. Such metaphors could be used, though, to express (and equally sometimes to inform and shape) quite different readings of the evidence.

John Henry Newman's *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845) offers an account of doctrinal development which resonates at various levels with the Vincentian model. Great ideas, Newman argues, require the passage of time in order to be fully developed and appreciated. They cannot be grasped in their fullness all at once, but must be worked out and reflected upon. The seed may be planted in a single moment by the teacher or event, and contains within it the potential for all that grows from it; but the growth takes time. Of course the history of doctrine contains errors and deviations as well as genuine and necessary growth of this sort, so Newman duly offers a set of criteria for discerning true developments from false ones. We need consider only two of these in order to get the general gist of his approach. 'The most ready test' for continuity, Newman writes, 'is suggested by the analogy of physical growth, which is such that the parts and proportions of the developed form correspond to those which belong to its rudiments. The adult animal has the same make as it had on its birth; young birds do not grow into fishes' (Newman 1974: 117). Newman's appeal, like Vincent's, is here to the preservation of a certain type or pattern, notwithstanding the growth and change which occurs. But Newman is ready to go further, and explicitly acknowledge the assimilation to itself and ingestion of extraneous and alien elements by the organism which is

Christian doctrine, just as 'whatever has life . . . grows by taking into its own substance external materials; and this absorption or assimilation is completed when the materials appropriated come to belong to it or enter into its own unity' (Newman 1974: 131). And so Newman's account continues, offering a powerful cumulative case for the essential continuity and identity of mid-nineteenth-century Roman Catholicism with the earliest church, its practices and beliefs, the evident differences between these notwithstanding.

A quite different view of the development of doctrine to that of Newman was offered by Adolf Harnack in his *History of Dogma*. For Harnack, the sort of approach taken by Newman while not unscholarly (Newman was the author of an acknowledged work on the Arian debates of the fourth century) was none the less too much influenced by prior dogmatic commitment to that which it wished to demonstrate, and to this extent 'unscientific' (Harnack 1894: 12). Harnack advocated a more 'critical' approach in which such commitments would deliberately be set aside and the evidence considered afresh and in an 'open minded' manner. The results of such an approach led him personally to the view that Christian doctrine had in fact changed substantially through its development in the early centuries, and often in ways best likened to a mutation through adaptation to factors in its intellectual environment, into a wholly distinct species. Harnack's famous observation that 'Dogma in its conception and development is a work of the Greek spirit on the soil of the gospel', while cast as historical description, is finally intended perjoratively, since for him 'that only is Christian which can be established authoritatively by the Gospel' (Harnack 1894: 13).

We should be clear, finally, that both Newman and Harnack allow for a wide diversity of types of and factors weighing upon development within the doctrine of the early church. Newman allows for deviancy of various sorts and levels, and Harnack is certainly not suggesting that all attempts to do theology in our period led inexorably away from the purity of the gospel message. Neither of them, therefore, is making any sweeping, universal or overly simplistic claims about what happened. Each is in fact focusing quite specifically in the heart of their arguments upon the mainstream of emergent dogma as identifiable in the credal tradition and the conciliar statements of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon. We may legitimately narrow the focus of the question of the development of doctrine, therefore, to the following specific inquiry: does the doctrine of the Nicene Creed (for example) represent something essentially continuous with or a distinct species from the Christianity of the apostolic era? It is here that they disagree, and vigorously so.

We cannot hope to resolve a dispute of this magnitude decisively one way or another here. It should be observed, though, that despite his stated determination to set all dogmatic commitments aside, Harnack's 'critical' view is in fact securely rooted in dogmas of one sort or another. If Newman is to be charged with too great and too explicit a concern for the identity and status of the Roman Catholic tradition (which he was embracing as his own at the time of writing his book), it is only fair that Harnack's aggressive Protestantism be laid bare. A resistance to ecclesiastical tradition in general, and a thoroughly Lutheran and Ritschlian reading of the gospel in moral rather than metaphysical terms, is apparent throughout what he

writes. In itself this fact hardly challenges the correctness of his assumptions, but it does rob them of the assumption of invulnerability which talk of 'objectivity' and 'scientific detachment' tends to attract in modern culture. Critical Harnack may indeed have been with respect to many things, but rarely with respect to his own presuppositions and their affect upon his judgements. Here, perhaps, Newman had the edge precisely because his fiduciary predispositions were a matter of public accounting.

The approach which Harnack represents and the general tenor of his conclusions have, until quite recently, enjoyed considerable popularity within scholarship. Many, that is to say, have broadly endorsed the supposition that the classical doctrines of God as Trinity and the hypostatic union of divine and human natures in the person of Jesus owe much to Hellenic patterns of thought, and to this extent constitute a discontinuous break with the patterns of biblical understanding. Each such case must be judged on its merits and in terms of the evidence which it presents. Other conclusions are certainly able to be had from a consideration of the same body of evidence, and views more akin in general terms to that of Newman are enjoying a respectable renaissance, allowing that the deployment of Hellenic categories entailed a more sophisticated analysis of key Christian ideas, but seeing this in terms of a deep exegesis of the biblical text, and thereby tracing an essential semantic connection and continuity between the classical dogmas of the fourth century and the text of scripture.²³

NOTES

- 1 It is worth reminding ourselves at the outset of our study of the close connection between theology and the liturgical life of the Christian community, a link which differentiates the ethos of the early centuries from our own. As Maurice Wiles notes of the theologians of this period, 'many of them were bishops, not merely participants but leaders in the liturgical life of the Church. And the fiercer the controversy in which they were involved, the more important it is to recall the influence of the Church's worship upon their doctrinal beliefs' (Wiles 1967: 62).
- 2 The English usage derives largely from the dominance of the German discipline of *Dogmengeschichte* or the History of Dogma. This discipline has its roots in the eighteenth century and developed its most distinctive form in the nineteenth at the hands of such scholars as F. C. Baur, I. Dorner, F. Loofs and A. Harnack.
- 3 Perhaps unsurprisingly, there has been considerable difference of opinion concerning the boundaries of 'dogma' in relation to 'doctrine', these centred mostly around the question of what may count as 'authoritative recognition in wide sections of the Church'. For Orr this category certainly included the great Reformation confessions (Augsburg, Second Helvetic, Westminster, Dort, etc.), but Harnack deliberately restricted the category to doctrines enshrined in the creeds drafted by the early ecumenical councils and reiterated in subsequent ages of church history. On this latter reckoning, the doctrines of incarnation and Trinity count as dogma, while those of holy scripture, the Eucharist, and justification through faith do not.
- 4 The connection with Athanasius is spurious. Most scholars date the text to the late fifth century. For the English text see, e.g., *The Scottish Book of Common Prayer* (1929), pp. 41-4.

- 5 On this creed, the legend surrounding its origins, and criticisms of that legend, see Kelly (1972: 1–6, and esp. 368–434).
- 6 So, for example, in the pseudonymous sermons *De Symbolo*. See Kelly (1972: 3).
- 7 See Kelly (1972: 16–23) and Young (1991: 8). For a full discussion of the subject see Cullmann (1949).
- 8 See *The Prescriptions Against the Heretics* 13, in Greenslade (1956: 39–40). Also *Against Praxeas* 2, in Evans (1948: 131–2).
- 9 See e.g. *De principiis* 1; English translation in Butterworth (1936).
- 10 We shall, for reasons of historical accuracy, refer to the formulary often called the ‘Nicene Creed’, and sometimes the ‘Nicene – Constantinopolitan Creed’, by this more accurate title. See Kelly (1972: ch. 10) for a full discussion of the relationship between the two creeds.
- 11 *Die Anfänge des Glaubensbekenntnisses* 226; cited in Kelly (1972: 30).
- 12 See Holmes (1989: 153). While the final editing of the text may date from the early second century, Holmes suggests that the materials contained in it reflect a more ancient state of affairs, perhaps as early as 60–70 CE (see Holmes 1989: 146).
- 13 See *Apology* 1:61 in Falls (1948: 99–100). Interestingly, it is clear here that the threefold name is ‘invoked over’ rather than pronounced by the baptizand.
- 14 See chapter 26 in Evans (1948: 172). Tertullian describes what happens thus: ‘not once, but thrice, are we baptized, unto each several Person at each several name’.
- 15 Scholars differ over the authorship of this text, some (e.g. Kelly 1972) accepting Hippolytus, the Roman anti-pope, as its author, with others (e.g. Young 1991) assuming its pseudonymity. The issue is not vital for our purposes; most concur with Kelly’s judgement that, whoever wrote it, the text may be trusted ‘for information about Roman liturgical practice at the end of the second and the beginning of the third century’ (Kelly 1972: 90). For further details see Jones *et al.* (1983: 57–9). For the text see Easton (1934).
- 16 On the text of and relationships between various western and Eastern creeds see Kelly (1972: ch. 6).
- 17 See, e.g., Tertullian’s refutation of the gnostic appeal to a hidden gospel in *Prescriptions Against Heretics* 25–6 (Greenslade 1956: 47–8).
- 18 As distinct from the Constantinopolitan formulary traditionally but erroneously described as the ‘Nicene Creed’. See note 10 above.
- 19 For an excellent account of the debates in this period see Young (1983).
- 20 The classical exposition of this assumption is found in Harnack (1894). Harnack’s thesis is, in essence, that any explicitly ecclesial approach to the question will always be prone to inadequacy, since it will inevitably (by virtue of the continuing authoritative status of dogma within the church) tend towards the assumption of a model of development which secures basic continuity of Christian identity. Being thus dogma-bound, it will be unable to give clear and full weight to all the evidence. With this he contrasts ‘the critical history of dogma’ (1894: 10) which deliberately frees itself from any such dogma and sees things differently.
- 21 See, for example, the fleeting reference in Hall (1991: 241).
- 22 See on this Steiner (1990).
- 23 See, for example, Yeago (1993), Bauckham (1998) and Torrance (1988).

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BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION



Oskar Skarsaune

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

A quite substantial part of Christian literature in the period covered in this volume is devoted to exposition of the Bible. In other words, the amount of material to be covered in the limited space of this chapter is enormous. It would be illusory even to think of attempting here anything like a complete, comprehensive survey of all biblical interpretation produced in our period.¹ Instead, a selective approach has been chosen. The material selected for treatment is thought to have representative value, so that through it some central currents in the development of biblical interpretation will become visible. An attempt is made to place early Christian interpretation of the Bible in its proper cultural context, which in the beginning was predominantly Hellenistic-Jewish, and gradually became more Hellenistic-Pagan.

THE JEWISH CONTEXT

The first believers in Jesus were Jews. To say this, of course, is to say the obvious. But it is also to say something of great significance for our theme. The first Christian interpreters of the Bible did not begin from scratch. They were Jews, and therefore heirs to a rich tradition of reading the Bible, re-telling the Bible, translating the Bible, interpreting the Bible.

In the first century CE this Jewish tradition of interpreting the Bible had already developed a rich variety of approaches, methods and concerns. In the land of Israel there was, and had been for a time, a proliferation of different 'schools', *hairesis*, as Josephus calls them; modern scholars call them parties or sects. Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, and Zealots ('The Fourth Philosophy') are enumerated by Josephus, and modern scholars would like to add some more: the Qumran covenanters were certainly related to the Essenes in some way, but possibly not identical with them; priestly scribes might represent a non-sectarian Judaism different from all the above, possibly there was also a distinct brand of Judaism in Galilee, etc. All of these had their distinctive approach to the scriptures, different in methods as well as results. If

we turn to the vast Jewish Diaspora, the spectrum of different traditions of Bible exegesis was hardly less wide.

Not all of these traditions were of equal relevance as contexts for early Christian interpretations of the Bible. Some of them are almost completely unknown to us, so we cannot relate to them anyway. The Christ-movement originated in Jerusalem and the land of Israel, which means that 'Palestinian' traditions should probably be seen as most relevant during the very first decades after 30 CE.² There were no watertight compartments, however, between the Jews of the Land and the Jews of the Diaspora. When there are similarities between the Qumran covenanters by the Dead Sea on the one hand, and their contemporary compatriot Philo in Alexandria on the other, it indicates that Philo was not simply a highly original representative of a local Judaism at Alexandria but that he also knew and used in his works traditions shared with the learned men in the Land of Israel (Borgen 1997).

The biblical interpretation of Jesus and Paul could probably be much better understood if we knew more than we do about the interpretations of the Pharisees of that period. Unfortunately we only have indirect sources to the pre-70 Pharisees. When the Dead Sea scrolls and Philo converge, these contemporary sources may tell something about the traditions Jesus and Paul knew. When the much later material in rabbinic literature, beginning with the *Mishnah* c. 200 CE onwards, seems to reflect traditions already presupposed in the pre-70 writings or traditions of the New Testament, we may also venture to use it as indirect source material. But in recent years scholars have become increasingly wary of uncritical back-dating of rabbinic traditions. On the other hand, this clearly implies an increased significance for the New Testament itself as a partly pre-70 source on pre-70 Judaism.

It is customary to subdivide rabbinic exegesis into two categories: *halachic* and *haggadic*. These terms are stock in trade in rabbinic literature, but are no doubt meaningful also with reference to pre-70 interpreters. The *halacha* is the sum total of the concrete, detailed rulings by which the interpreters of the Law tried to turn the Law of Moses into an exact code of law, and to supplement it where it said nothing concrete. In rabbinic tradition Hillel the Elder (flourished c. 20 BCE–15 CE) is credited with the formulation of 'seven rules' of interpretation. All of them are hermeneutical principles from Hellenistic forensic rhetoric, and play a fundamental role in rabbinic *halachic* exegesis. Hillel's rules and the underlying hermeneutical principles are exactly those which legal experts applied to *codes of law* in Hellenism.³ The basic aim of these exegetical principles is to derive exact rulings in specific cases from the rather general directives of the biblical Torah. In other words: Hillel treats the biblical text the same way a Hellenistic lawyer would treat his code of law.

The attribution of these principles to Hillel may be legend, but the point is that many discussions about details as well as main principles in the Law between Jesus and the contemporary legal experts can often be clarified by reference to Hillel's rules (sometimes also by other principles not formulated by him, but frequently used in early rabbinical sources and the Qumran writings). Daube (1956) made several pioneering attempts at analysis along these lines. Recently Brewer (1992) has undertaken a detailed study of all pre-70 exegeses in rabbinic literature. He finds

that they are all *halachic*, and that they all display the characteristics of this kind of exegesis, which he calls 'nomological'. He discerns five basic principles behind Hillel's and other rules of *halachic* interpretation: (1) scripture is totally self-consistent (there are no contradictions); (2) every detail in scripture is significant (there is no unnecessary redundancy; apparent repetitions have deeper significance); (3) scripture should be read according to its context; (4) scripture does not have a secondary meaning; (5) there is only one valid text form of scripture. In later rabbinic terminology this kind of exegesis would be called the *peshat*, the 'plain' meaning of the text.

It is not only material in the gospels that may be elucidated in this context; also in Paul's letters one may often observe the same type of *halachic* reasoning – even in Paul's sometimes quite sophisticated arguments *against* the continued validity of the Law as a means of obtaining righteousness before God!

It should be emphasized that as far as our evidence goes, the author of the Gospel of Matthew is the last Christian author to whom this whole culture of detailed *halachic* exegesis is still familiar. Very soon, the Christian idea that the Law was *abrogated* in Christ, or that it applied to the Jews exclusively, and not to gentiles, made the whole question of exactly how the Law should be practised quite irrelevant, at least for gentile members of the Christ-movement.

The appropriation and continuation of Jewish *haggadic* exegesis among early followers of Christ is to some extent a different story. It is hardly possible to make a comprehensive statement about the concerns and aims of *haggadic* exegesis. The term derives from the verb *higgid*, 'to tell, narrate', and *haggadic* exegesis is applied primarily to the narrative texts of scripture. Biblical narratives are scrutinized in search of *halachic* precedents, but also moral or theological lessons of a more general character. Sometimes clues are extracted from the texts which are thought to illuminate contemporary events and pressing dilemmas. Also with regard to eschatology and the portrait of the coming Messiah(s), *haggadic* exegesis often informed and enriched the eschatological projection of biblical models. A basic principle behind all this was formulated at a later period: 'As the first redeemer [Moses] -so the last [the Messiah].'⁴ Or, in more general terms: there is a correspondence between patterns of events and actors in the 'classic' history of redemption and in the end-time events.⁵ As to exegetical techniques, this type of interpretation parts company with the *halachic* approach outlined above. In *haggadic* exegesis scripture is found to have one or more secondary meanings (of an allegorical type), and often variant readings of the consonantal text are preferred.⁶ In later rabbinic tradition this exegesis would be called the *derash* (roughly: 'scrutiny') interpretation of the text.

It would far exceed the scope of the present chapter if we were to expound in any detail how this *haggadic* interpretation is put into practice in the different New Testament writings, and how rich a variety of exegetical techniques are employed.⁷ Here it may suffice to say that many New Testament authors evince a great familiarity with *haggadic* details in the Jewish interpretative tradition, to which they allude explicitly or implicitly. One example: when Paul in 1 Cor. 10:4 says that the Israelites in the desert drank from the supernatural rock that *followed* them, he presupposes the rabbinic interpretation of the scriptural doublette in the narratives

of Exodus and Numbers: we hear of the same rock (from which Moses drew water) in two places, Exodus 17 (at Rephidim/Horeb) and Numbers 20 (at Kadesh). The rabbis concluded: 'The rock with water ascended with them to the mountain-tops and descended with them into the valleys; wherever Israel dwelled, the rock dwelled with them, opposite the entrance to the Tent of meeting.'⁸

In the same context, Paul states very clearly the principle of correspondence, the 'typical', model-like character of the classical history of salvation: 'These things are warning examples [Greek: *typoi*] for us . . . upon whom the end of the ages has come' (1 Cor. 10:6, 11).

In this and other ways exegesis of the scriptures among first-century Christ-followers was deeply embedded in Jewish traditions. And this did not change overnight when we turn to the Christian interpreters of the second and third centuries. When we find that they, too, incorporate Jewish *haggada* in their own expositions – approvingly or as polemic counterpoints – it may often be observed that they cannot have learnt all this from the New Testament or other Christian sources from the first century. They seem rather to be in touch with developments within contemporary Jewish exegesis. Again, one example: towards the end of the fifth book of *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus makes a summary of what he has shown in the preceding treatment. The prophets have all spoken about the blessings to be realized in the millennial kingdom of Christ, concretely upon Earth. Regarding the eternal life following the millennium, no prophet saw that far: 'those [are the] things which neither the eye has seen, nor the ear has heard, nor have arisen within the heart of [any] man' – not even to any prophet's eye, ear or heart has this been revealed.⁹ The scripture quoted here is Isa. 64:3, in the text-form it has in 1 Cor. 2:9. For Irenaeus this saying of scripture means that the prophets 'saw' the blessings of the earthly millennial kingdom of Christ, but not the subsequent life of the blessed in the world to come. This is all very different from the millenarian ideas of Revelation, and also very different from Justin's millenarian doctrine some decades earlier. It is quite a parallel, however, to roughly contemporary saying of leading rabbis. The rabbis by that time had begun to distinguish between 'the days of the messiah' as an intermediate period before the final aeon of life eternal, the 'coming world'.¹⁰ They disagreed as to what the prophets had spoken about: the days of the Messiah or the coming world. In the third century rabbi Johanan stated the one position in this debate the following way: 'All the prophets prophesied only in respect of the days of the Messiah; but as for the world to come, "no eye has seen – except you, O Lord – what he has prepared for those who wait for him" (Isa. 64:3)'.¹¹ The structure in this eschatological model is strictly parallel to that of Irenaeus; so is the scriptural testimony chosen to 'prove' it. This parallelism is hardly accidental; it seems there was some kind of contact between eschatological thinking among the rabbis and Christian theologians.

Pesher interpretation

Before we conclude this section on Jewish contexts for early Christian interpretation, we should add a few remarks concerning one point. As is well known, we find in the New Testament a distinct kind of interpretation of prophetic oracles in which the

interpretation is simply given through a reference to the event which is supposed to realize the prophecy: 'This happened so that what was said by the prophet should be fulfilled . . . ' (the fulfilment quotations in Matthew and John, and by implication in several of the speeches in Acts). The basic claim here is that the event corresponds to the prediction contained in the text; in other words, the text is a prophecy 'fulfilled' in the event. In making the event occur, God kept his promise contained in the prophecy. At the same time, the prophecy explains the meaning or significance of the event. The biblical text and the historical event interpret each other mutually.

This way of interpreting biblical texts was not new within Judaism. When revolutionary changes took place, when history seemed to take unforeseen twists and turns, Israelites would turn to the scriptures to find explanations and guidance in the new situation. Ultimately, they sought confirmation of their continued identity and *legitimacy* as God's elect people, still under his grace and favour. The Qumran covenanters by the Dead Sea had to cope with shocking realities: their leader and founder had been rejected and persecuted by the ruling priestly leadership; the Temple was polluted by illegitimate sacrifices and festivals; they themselves were rejected and reduced to marginality within Jewish society; their interpretation of the Law was not recognized by the ruling leadership, etc. For all this, and more, they sought, and found, predictions and explanations in scripture. In so doing, they developed an interpretation they called the *pesher* of the text; *pesher* being an Aramaic term frequently used in the book of Daniel for the interpretation of dreams. In speaking about the *pesher* of the prophetic texts of the Bible, the Qumran covenanters indirectly characterized the prophetic texts as dreams or visions about their own time and circumstances, to be unriddled by inspired interpretation.¹² It seems a development took place: in the earlier Dead Sea texts, single pericopes (passages) from the Bible are given a *pesher* interpretation; later whole books are regarded as coherent visions about the (present) end-time, resulting in fully-fledged *pesher* commentaries verse by verse.

Early Christian interpretations of prophetic texts have much in common, from a hermeneutical point of view, with the Qumran *pesher*. But they have a greater thematic unity because of their exclusive Christological focus, and at the same time a greater methodological variety with regard to exegetical techniques.

THE DISTINCTIVELY CHRISTIAN 'PROOF FROM PROPHECY'

The New Testament and the early Fathers

A convenient point of departure is to be found in Paul's *kerygma* summary in 1 Cor. 15:3–5:

I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received,

- that Christ died for our sins *in accordance with the scriptures*,
- that he was buried,

- that he was raised on the third day *in accordance with the scriptures*,
- and that he appeared to Cephas . . .

It was part of the primitive Christian *kerygma*, the primary proclamation of the faith, that the startling and unexpected aspects of Jesus' Messianic career – his death by crucifixion and his resurrection – were in fact not contrary to, but 'in accordance with the scriptures'.

No doubt they were contrary to Jewish expectations with regard to the Davidic Messiah (even if we make allowance for the great diversity in the Messianic expectations of the period). And Jewish expectations were based on current and widely accepted interpretations of the biblical texts understood to refer to the Messiah(s). The discrepancy between this biblically based picture of the career of the Messiah, and the actual career of Jesus, created the need for *innovative interpretation* of traditional Messianic proof-texts, but also innovative selection of *new texts* which had formerly not been taken to refer to the Messiah. In Luke's gospel, this *novelty* of the Christian scriptural 'proof' of the Messiah's career is most vividly brought out on the journey to Emmaus in Luke 24: the risen Christ 'opened' the scriptures so that the disciples could see things in them they had never seen before.

[The risen Jesus] opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written,

- that the Messiah should suffer
- and on the third day rise from the dead,
- and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.'

(Luke 24:45–7)

The novelty was a suffering and risen Messiah gathering a new people of God beyond the boundaries of Israel, 'a people for his name from the gentiles' (Acts 15:14), a new people of God being saved by forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus. In a masterpiece of condensation, Luke has in these few lines pointed out the startling novelties of the Christian *kerygma*, compared with traditional Jewish Messianism, and claimed that precisely these novelties had the full support of scripture.

In a now classic study, Arthur von Ungern-Sternberg¹³ showed that this tradition of Christian 'proof from the scriptures'¹⁴ develops with a remarkable degree of continuity and stability from the New Testament right until and inclusive of Eusebius of Caesarea at around 300 CE. To illustrate this continuity in the shortest possible way, we juxtapose here Justin's summary of his scriptural proof (c. 150 CE) and that of Irenaeus (c. 190 CE), which both continue the line of development begun by Paul's and Luke's summaries above:

In the books of the Prophets we found Jesus our Christ foretold as

- coming to us born of a virgin, reaching manhood, curing every disease and ailment, raising the dead to life,
- being hated, unrecognized, and crucified, dying,
- rising from the dead, ascending into heaven . . .
- and that he would send certain persons to every nation to make known

these things, and that the gentiles rather [than the Jews] would believe in him.

(Justin, *1 Apology* 31.7)

The Church . . . has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith:

- (1) in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth . . .
- (2) and in one Christ Jesus the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation;
- (3) and in the Holy Spirit, *who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God and the advents [of the Messiah]:*
 - the birth from a virgin;
 - and the passion;
 - and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven . . . of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord,
 - and his [second] manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father . . . to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race . . .

(Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.10.1)

As the excerpt from Irenaeus makes evident, the development of a Christological ‘proof from prophecy’ is intimately linked with the crystallization of a Christological ‘rule of truth’ or ‘rule of faith’, which some decades later was incorporated in the second article of the Old Roman creed.¹⁵ Much more is at stake here than a mere parallel development of two parts of the Christian tradition. The ‘rule of faith’ serves as the basic exegetical criterion for the development of the biblical ‘proof from prophecy’. This is probably indicated already in a famous saying by Ignatius of Antioch at around 110 CE:

I heard some men saying, ‘if I find it not in the charters, I do not believe in the gospel.’ And when I said to them that it is in the scriptures, they answered me, ‘that is exactly the question.’ But to me the charters are Jesus Christ, the inviolable charter is his cross, and death, and resurrection, and the faith which is through him.

(Ignatius, *to the Philadelphians* 8.2)

It would seem that Ignatius’ opponents required a full proof from prophecy for every point in his gospel proclamation. When he says that to him the ‘archives’ *are* Jesus Christ, his cross and resurrection, this does probably not mean that for Ignatius the Christological creed *replaces* the scriptures, but rather that the Christological rule of faith contains the *hermeneutical canon* according to which the scriptures should be interpreted.

This was no idiosyncrasy of Ignatius; it was to become the common conviction of ecclesiastical theologians. In her fine study of Christian biblical exegesis during the first five centuries, Frances M. Young (1997) has shown that interpreting the scriptures according to the ‘rule of faith’ was implicit in ecclesiastical exegesis before Irenaeus stated it explicitly, and that it remained operative in later exegetes, and can be shown to form the core of Athanasius’ biblical case against the Arians (in the 320s–350s period). The one who interprets scripture apart from the Christology of

the creed, says Athanasius, is not in touch with the 'mind' (*dianoia*) of scripture (Young 1997: 17–45).

Having stressed this aspect of basic continuity in the Christological reading of the scriptures, we have to add that there are also elements of development and change in this proof-from-prophecy tradition. We shall look at some of them.

From different Messiah to Jewish Messiah

We have seen that in the beginning (Paul's traditional *kerygma* in 1 Corinthians 15) the focus of the Christological proof from the scriptures was the aspects of Jesus' career that were *not* part of traditional Jewish expectations. The same focus on scriptural 'proof' for things not expected about the Messiah seems to be present in the 'fulfilment quotations' in Matthew: he was born of a virgin, (1:23); already as a baby he had to flee to Egypt, (2:15); his birth resulted in a massacre, not peace, (2:18); he was called a Nazarene, (2:23); he lived and worked in 'the Galilee of the gentiles', not Judah, (4:14–16), etc. One observes the same tendency in the fulfilment quotations in John and in the scriptural proof in the early speeches in Acts. The unexpected novelties, first and foremost the cross and the resurrection/ascension, are at the very centre of the proof from prophecy.

In the latest strata of New Testament literature, and in the literature of the second century, we observe, however, an increased use of more traditional Messianic proof-texts in the Christological proof. The Christian proof that Jesus is the Messiah in a way becomes 'more Jewish' and 'more complete'. In Justin traditional Messianic proof-texts such as Gen. 49:10 (the famous Shilo oracle) and Num. 24:17 (the Star from Jacob – important for the Jewish Messiah Bar Kochba) are given prominent position and extensive exposition. What we observe is an amplification of the Christian proof-text dossier to include more of the traditional Jewish Messianism. We see Justin Martyr painting a strikingly Jewish portrait of Messiah Jesus and his task; applying to Jesus all the main Messianic proof-texts which loom large in the Dead Sea scrolls and the rabbinical writings – but not in the New Testament.¹⁶

This development is continued in some later Greek and Latin writers, like Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, and Eusebius,¹⁷ but most of all in the Syriac Fathers, like Aphrahat and Ephrem.¹⁸ On the other hand, these Fathers in many ways represent the culmination point of this development; in still later Greek and Latin Fathers we observe again a greater distance from Jewish Messianism. This probably has to do with the increased importance of Logos Christology compared with Messiah Christology. Or in terms of the emerging creeds: the exegetical 'rule of faith' gradually shifts from an Old Roman type of credal summary to the eastern-Nicene type.

From Books to Testimonies

In the New Testament writings there is normally a quite wide and also an even distribution of the scriptural quotations with regard to the different books of scripture. In other words, most New Testament authors have the biblical books at their fingertips and can choose apposite quotations freely, from a rich and thorough

knowledge of the entire biblical text¹⁹ – very much like the rabbis of rabbinical literature.²⁰ At the same time, however, a certain selection of favourite proof-texts is in the making – a kind of basic proof-texts dossier. In a now classic study of the ‘sub-structure of New Testament theology’, C. H. Dodd (1965) showed that these texts were not chosen at random, nor were they entirely severed from their biblical context. Instead, Dodd argued, certain scriptural passages of considerable length were found to be particularly relevant as foreshadowing the basic pattern in the New Testament events. When selected phrases from these text-units were quoted, the entire scriptural context of these greater units was called to mind, and other key-passages from the same unit can often pop up in the same New Testament context. Long before the concepts of ‘sub-text’ or ‘intertextuality’ became fashionable, Dodd demonstrated the great relevance of this phenomenon.

Turning to the evidence of the second century, one observes that the process of forming a set dossier of proof-texts continues, and that the interpretative effort is concentrated more and more on this selection of Christian proof-texts.²¹ Some scholars have speculated that this process had a concrete literary basis in a standard anthology (or anthologies) of scriptural proof-texts, a so-called ‘testimony book’. The existence of one or more such books is difficult to prove, and the available evidence seems rather to indicate that later Christian writers in general borrowed scriptural quotations as well as exegetical comments on those quotations from earlier Christian writers.²² In any case there is good reason to speak of a *tradition* of proof-texts (or ‘testimonies’) and appended interpretations; a tradition we can follow from writer to writer: from the Epistle of Barnabas through Justin, Melito, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Novatian and Cyprian. The quite characteristic feature of this tradition is the almost exclusive concentration on *prophetic predictions* of Jesus’ career and the history of the Church – whether these predictions are found (1) in prophetic oracles, (2) legal practices, or (3) ‘typical’ events contained in scripture. One example from Justin of each of these may suffice to give the reader an idea of how this ‘testimony approach’ to scripture works.

The fulfilment of prophecy

Our example is Justin’s interpretation of Gen. 49:10f., which he regards (as Jewish exegetes did) as a predictive oracle about the Messiah:

- (A) The [saying] ‘He shall be the expectation of the nations’
- (B) shows that men of every nation will look forward to his coming again,
- (C) as you can clearly see and be convinced by the facts . . .
- (A) The [saying] ‘Binding his foal to the vine . . .’
- (B) is a symbolic exhibition of the things that would happen to Christ . . .
- (C) for an ass’s foal was standing at the entrance of a village . . .
- (A) The ‘washing his robe in the blood of the grape’
- (B/C) was predictive of the passion which he was to suffer, cleansing by his blood those who believe in him. For the men who believe on him are what the divine Spirit through the prophet calls a garment . . .

(Justin *1 Apol.* 32.4–8)

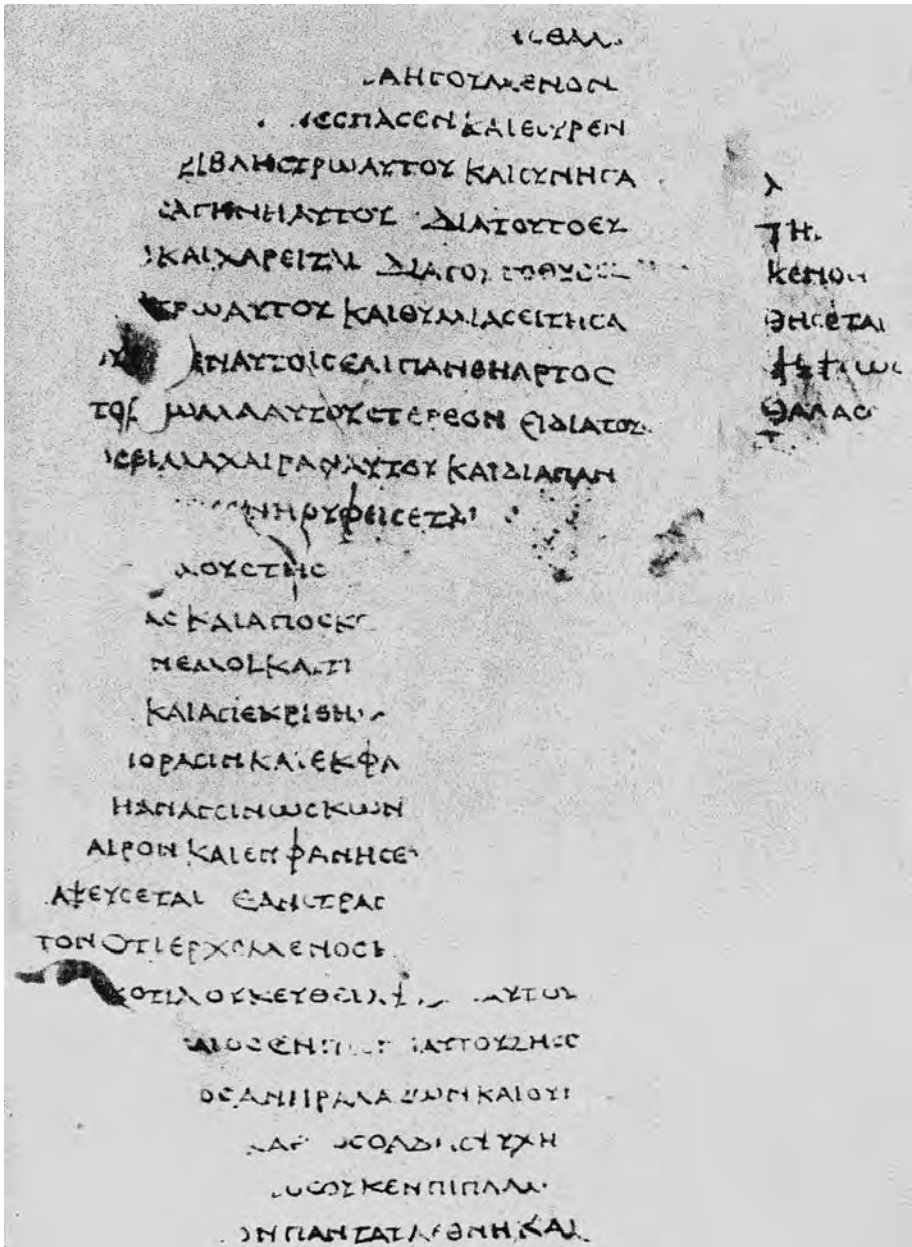


Figure 26.1 The high prestige book format of antiquity was *the scroll*. All antique Jewish biblical manuscripts that have come down to us were written by professional scribes in the professional calligraphy of the time. The fragment of the Jewish Greek Twelve Prophets Scroll from the Judean Desert shown here is a good example. Christian biblical manuscripts, by contrast, were written as codices and in the beginning not by professional calligraphers. Photo from Würthwein (1966: 171).

The scheme of this type of exegesis is simple and rather consistent: First(A) a portion of the oracle is quoted, next (B) the interpretation is given, then (C) it is pointed out how this fits some fact or aspect of Jesus' career. As one can see, in the interpretation it is often the case that words or phrases are taken to be figurative or metaphors; one might therefore call these interpretations allegorical. For example, the 'garment' of the Messiah is his community of believers. The purpose of these allegorical interpretations is not, however, to transfer the concrete realities of the prophetic oracle to the realm of abstract virtues or spiritual realities – as in Philo or Origen (see pp. 675–9). It is rather to make the prophetic oracle 'match' its supposed 'fulfillment' concretely and in all details.

The closest parallel to this kind of exegesis occurs in the *pesher* interpretations in the Qumran scrolls. One random example:

(A) 'The lion went there, and the lioness, and the cubs, and there is no one who frightens them' [Nahum.2:12]. (B/C) The interpretation of this concerns the king Demetrius, King of Jawan, who craved to come to Jerusalem . . .

(4Q *Pesher Nahum*)

Types in the Law

An example of 'testimony' interpretation of a commandment in the Law, is the following about the paschal lamb:

The mystery of the lamb which God has ordered you to sacrifice as the Passover was a type of Christ, with whose blood the believers . . . anoint their houses, that is, themselves . . . And that lamb you were ordered to roast whole was a symbol of Christ's suffering on the cross. The lamb, while being roasted, resembles the figure of the cross, for one spit is pierced from the lower parts to the head, and one at the back, to which the legs are fastened

(Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 40:1–3)²³

As one can easily observe, this is very similar to the *typological* interpretation of *narrative texts* that we are to consider next. Legal commandments, when performed, are also about events.

The same typology of Christ as the paschal lamb is developed from the same biblical text, Exodus 12, by Melito of Sardis, but he treats Exodus 12 as a narrative, not Law. He also develops a 'theory' of why God directs salvation history so as to make typological reading of the biblical events possible:

What is said and done is nothing . . . without a comparison and preliminary sketch . . . This is just what happens in the case of a preliminary structure: it does not arise as a finished work, but because of what is going to be visible through its image acting as a model. For this reason a preliminary sketch is made of the future thing out of wax or of clay or of wood, in order that what will soon arise taller in height, and stronger in power, and beautiful in form, and rich in its construction, may be seen through a small and perishable sketch.

(Melito, *Peri Pascha* 35f.)²⁴

Types in narratives

The following is a typical example of Justin's typological reading of scriptural narratives:

Righteous Noah [with his family] . . . at the Flood . . . eight persons in number, were a symbol of the number of the eighth day, on which our Christ appeared risen from the dead, a day which is however always first in power. For Christ, the first-born of all creation, also became the beginning of a new race, a race regenerated by him through water and faith and wood which contains the mystery of the cross, the same way as Noah was saved by wood as he rode on the waves with his family.

(Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 138.1f.)

It is debatable whether 'allegorical reading' is the best characterization of this kind of interpretation. Justin is not primarily concerned with single metaphors in the text, which he then transfers one by one to the spiritual realm. He is rather concerned with the total 'picture' presented in the narrative, centred around the 'wood' and 'water' as the pictures of the cross and baptism. To use Frances M. Young's terminology, Justin is exploiting the 'iconic' dimensions of the text.²⁵

Having studied these examples of the 'proof from prophecy' or 'testimony' approach to scripture, it is easy to see that this type of interpretation was best suited to single, isolated 'oracles' and 'types'. Scripture is considered as a store-house of such oracles, an inexhaustible source of prophetic predictions. But they are treated one by one, not as part of a continuous, coherent textual whole, such as a biblical book. This exegetical approach almost never resulted in full-fledged verse-by-verse commentaries on entire biblical books.²⁶

The exception comes in one of the last representatives of this tradition, Hippolytus, who wrote commentaries on Daniel and the Song of Songs. But these represent the same hermeneutics as in the old 'testimony' approach: the whole text of Daniel or Song of Songs is regarded as a continuous series of predictive types or oracles, fulfilled in the story of Jesus and the church.²⁷

The proof from prophecy in changing contexts

It almost goes without saying that the intense concern in this tradition of legitimizing Jesus as the Messiah and the church as the end-time Israel, must be understood within a Jewish framework. Jewish culture, Jewish questions, Jewish opposition is the constant backdrop to this tradition, not only in its early formative period but also later. In this tradition we see an important part of early Christian self-definition, first within, later *vis-à-vis* Judaism. In the beginning, the startling novelties of the Christian *kerygma* are legitimized from the highest Jewish authority: the scriptures. Later, Jesus is legitimized as also fulfilling the more traditional expectations attached to the Jewish Messiah. And the church of Jews and gentiles is legitimized as the end-time people of God, predicted by all the prophets.

But through the second and third centuries CE, this tradition also acquired secondary functions *vis-à-vis* the non-Jewish environment, which increasingly became

the most important environment of the early church. First, the fact of prophetic announcement of the gospel events centuries before they happened was a powerful apologetic argument against the main 'flaw' of the Christian *kerygma*: its newness or lateness. Second, the fact of prediction secured the reliability of the gospel record and the truly divine nature of Jesus. Justin takes advantage of the proof from prophecy in both respects in his *First Apology* to a gentile audience:

So that nobody should argue against us: 'What excludes [the view] that this man whom you call Christ was a man of merely human origin, and that he did these miracles you speak of by magic art, and so appeared only to be God's son?' – we will bring forward our proofs. We do not trust in hearsay, but must of necessity believe those who prophesied [what happened to Christ] before it came to pass. We see that things have happened and still do happen exactly as was predicted. This will, I think, be the greatest and surest proof for you [gentiles] too . . . [The career of Christ] was prophesied over five thousand years before he appeared, then three thousand, and two thousand, and again one thousand, and once more eight hundred [years before]. For there were new prophets time and again as the generations passed.

(Justin, 1 *Apol.* 30:1 and 31:8)²⁸

By appropriating, through the 'proof from prophecy', the entire Bible as their own, Christians became heirs to the Jewish apologetic motif of the greater antiquity of Moses compared with Homer and the other wise men of old in Hellenism.²⁹ In Theophilus of Antioch, this proof of the greater antiquity of the biblical authors receives extended treatment in the third book of *Against Autolycus*.

But there was a third argumentative setting in which the 'proof from prophecy' was reused in perhaps the most important secondary function. In the debate with Marcion and the gnostics in the second century CE, one finds an extensive use of the proof-text tradition. Marcion and the gnostics agreed on one crucial point: the creator-God of the Jewish Bible was not identical with the Father, the highest God, from whom Jesus Christ was sent. In addition to that, Marcion agreed with Judaism on another point: Jesus was not the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. Therefore, the traditional Christian 'proof from prophecy' had to be repeated and strengthened in debate with Marcion. One observes this most vividly in Tertullian: large portions of his *Adversus Ioudaeos* recur almost word by word in *Adversus Marcionem*.³⁰ A similar mechanism is at work in Irenaeus in his debate with the gnostics.³¹ Gnostics generally showed little or no interest in Messianic prophecies, and – like Marcion – denied the father-son relationship between Christ and the creator-God of the Old Testament. In order to combat this, Irenaeus once again marshals the proof-text tradition. But the 'direction' of the proof has been reversed. While discussing with Jews, one could take the authority of the Old Testament for granted, while the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies in Jesus and the church were the objects of proof. In debate with gnostics, it was the other way round: the authority of Jesus as the revealer of truth was uncontested. The very possibility, however, of proving that Jesus had been predicted by the prophets, and that therefore the Old Testament was a revelation given by His Father, was the best possible vindication of the authority and the divine origin of the Old Testament.

In this way the proof-text tradition was developed and modified in different settings, and also became a cherished piece of supporting argument in internal Christian instruction, as in Irenaeus' *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, or Novatian's *De trinitate*.

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION: FROM THE SCRIPTURES TO TWO TESTAMENTS

In the tradition of scriptural interpretation we have reviewed so far, the Christian scriptures are the same as the Jewish scriptures in Greek, although Christians from Melito of Sardis onwards gave them a new name: the books of the Old Covenant/Testament.³² The scriptures in their entirety were understood primarily as prophetic, they *predicted* the salvific events that had happened with and through Jesus. As prophetic they were also *inspired*, the two concepts of prophecy and inspiration through the Spirit were nearly identical in early Christianity (as they were in much of contemporary Judaism). The New Testament writings were partly the simple *report* on the fulfilment of the scriptures: the Gospel narratives. Partly they were lessons on how to read and interpret the scriptures – this is the way Justin uses Paul's letters. For Justin, the most important material in Romans, for example, is the scriptural quotations of the epistle!

This means: in the 'proof from prophecy' type of interpretation it is only the Old Testament which is the object of exegesis, not the New Testament writings. The

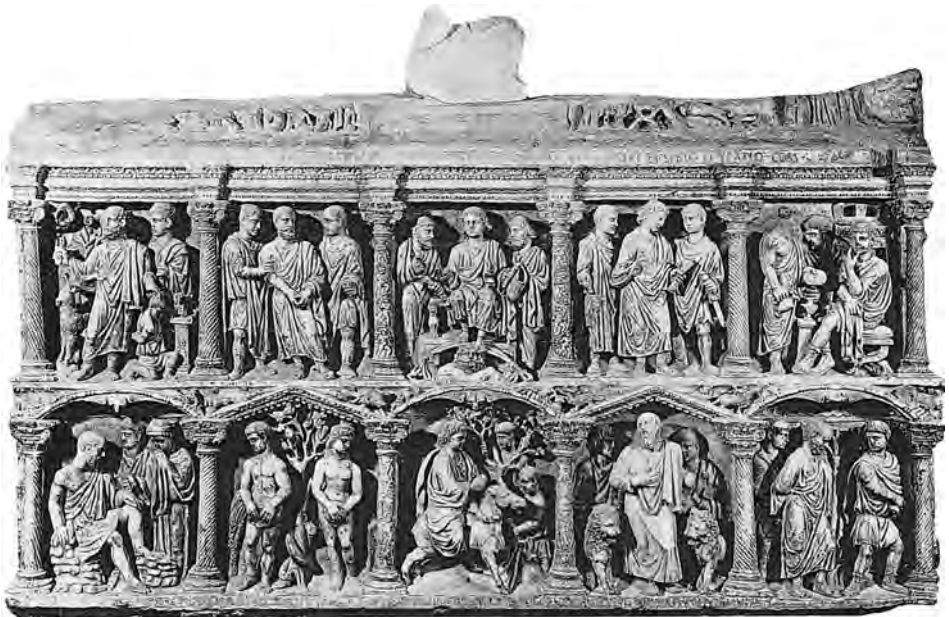


Figure 26.2 Photo of front of the Junius Bassus sarcophagus (359 CE) in the Vatican. Tafel 104 in Deichmann (1967).

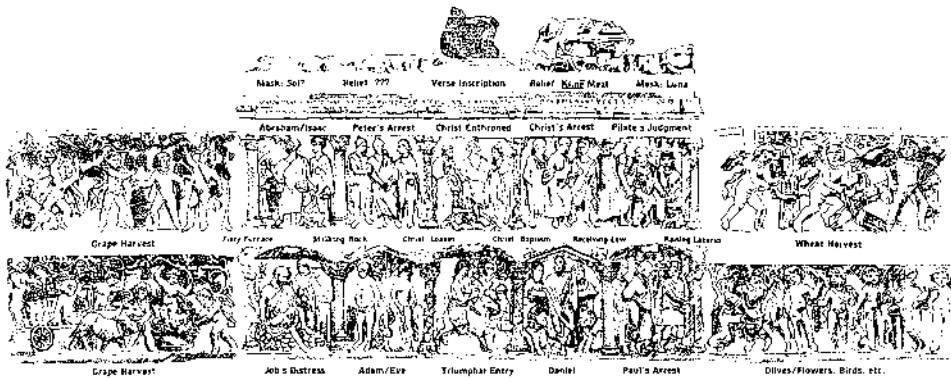


Figure 26.3 Drawing of lid decorations (top), endpanels (left and right) and front panels (centre) on Junius Bassus' sarcophagus.³³ From Malbon (1990: diagram I-I).

New Testament writings are considered clear and straightforward; they only need to be read and heard; it is the Old Testament which is the Scripture in need of interpretation.

This does not mean that the New Testament writings were not accorded high authority before they became the object of explicitly exegetical endeavours. It rather means that texts are seldom subjected to explicitly exegetical procedures until they are perceived as enigmatic, or their interpretation has become controversial. The latter happened to New Testament works primarily in the debate with Marcion and Gnosticism during the second century. This does not mean there was no implicit interpretation of New Testament texts before that time. It means, however, that all interpretative activity was expressed indirectly, through the practical and theoretical *application* the New Testament texts received. In an early writing like *1 Clement*, this is true not only in relation to the rich use of New Testament texts and allusions, it is also to a great extent true of the even richer use of Old Testament texts and examples. There is little if any explicit exegesis of any scriptural texts in this epistle, which quotes and alludes so frequently to both Testaments. The scriptural interpretation is expressed indirectly, through the use that is made of the scriptural and New Testament material.³⁴

It is only when we come to the anti-gnostic or anti-Marcion polemicists of the second century that we encounter for the first time explicit discussions of the meaning and import of New Testament passages.³⁵ Marcion had confronted the ecclesiastical tradition with a formidable exegetical challenge, indirectly through his 'purged' version of the Gospel text and the text of the (ten) Pauline letters, directly through his highly polemical 'Antitheses'. Very likely Justin was the first to confront him on any broader basis, but his work has been lost, and it is Irenaeus' and Tertullian's works that have come down to us. In both writers we observe the effort to refute Marcion from that part of the New Testament text which he recognized as authentic, be it the 'purged' Gospel or the letters of Paul. Especially with regard to the Pauline letters, we see here the very beginnings of the long and complicated history of interpretation of the Pauline corpus. There

were sayings in Paul which were not easily squared with the ecclesiastical rule of faith. How, for example, are we to reconcile the 'resurrection of the flesh' with Paul's saying that 'flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God' (1 Cor. 15:50). This was an issue *vis-à-vis* the gnostics also.³⁶ And with regard to Marcion, there was the additional challenge of proving that the 12 Apostles were in agreement with Paul.

As Hans von Campenhausen has pointed out, the latter challenge made Irenaeus a pioneer of 'redactional criticism' with regard to the Gospels of Matthew and John (1968: 224–30). Irenaeus needed sources from which to document the authentic theology of the 12 Apostles. For Peter he used his speeches in Acts, for John he used the Gospel of John and for Matthew he used the Gospel of Matthew. In other words, Irenaeus did not use these Gospels in the ordinary way, as sources to Jesus' doctrine, but as sources to the theology of the evangelists!

Just as was the case with the exegesis of the Old Testament, the object of this New Testament interpretation was to demonstrate the agreement between the doctrine of Jesus and the Apostles on the one hand, and the ecclesiastical rule of faith/truth on the other. Because the dominant thrust of gnostic exegesis, with regard to the words of Jesus as to the sayings of Paul, was to take them in a highly spiritualized vein, the thrust of Irenaeus and Tertullian is rather for literal and 'plain' reading of the texts. In rebutting fanciful gnostic interpretations, the two Fathers often evince plain exegetical common sense, and the modern exegete may on occasion feel there is little difference between their way of reasoning and his/her own.³⁷

In one respect the New Testament exegesis of these Fathers is strikingly similar to their treatment of the Old Testament: they only treat single questions and single controversial texts. They never write a commentary on any New Testament book – as far as we know. Nor do Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian, with the same provision.

We only mention this to bring out the almost complete contrast, and the feeling one has of entering a completely different world, when one turns to the vast exegetical corpus of Origen of Alexandria – the subject of our next section.

SCRIPTURE AS PLATONIC ALLEGORY: THE ALEXANDRIAN TRADITION³⁸

In Hellenism in general, there was a literary canon which was basic to all education, and which played the role of a 'Scripture' common to all: Homer's *Illiad* and *Odyssey*. With this almost sacred canon as text, children in elementary school learnt their grammar, and in more advanced studies learnt the rules of rhetoric and allegorical interpretation. The necessity and the justification of interpreting Homer allegorically had to do with the theories of the leading school of philosophy at the time: the Middle Platonists. Plato had rejected the myths of Homer altogether; they told stories completely unworthy of the gods, and removed by two steps of imitation from the divine reality they purported to portray. Instead, the 'theology' of the ideal republic should always be true to the nature of the divine reality (*Republic* 379A). This complete rejection of Homer was not accepted by the rival Stoic philosophy; instead, the Stoic philosophers 'saved' Homer by regarding him as a divinely

inspired author who had dressed 'true' (or 'natural') theology in allegorical garb. His texts were philosophical enigmas to be unriddled by the interpreter. In Middle Platonism – itself an amalgam of the Platonic and Stoic traditions – this approach to the Homeric myths was developed further, and through the influence of the dominant Middle Platonic school this was made part of the common curriculum and common learning in the more advanced levels of classical education.³⁹

Speaking of the Jewish and Christian adoption of this kind of literary and scholarly culture, we are by far best informed with regard to Alexandria. Here we meet a Jewish Middle Platonist, Philo, who adopts the allegorical exegesis of the Middle Platonic school, but applies it to the Torah of Moses.⁴⁰ Here we meet two Christian Middle Platonists, Clement and Origen, who in turn adopt large quantities of the allegorical exegesis of Philo, but then also develop their own Christian variety along the same hermeneutical lines. It all results in something qualitatively new in the history of Christian biblical interpretation.

For the sake of brevity, we shall concentrate on Origen in the following presentation of the Alexandrian approach (see Chapter 39 of this volume for a profile of Origen). He was the one who was to influence ecclesiastical interpretation of the Bible in East and West for a very long time.⁴¹

Basic to the Platonic world-view was the conviction that the invisible world of intelligible ideas is more real than the visible world of sensible objects, and that the latter contains images, copies, of the former. The contrast of the visible versus the invisible world is, so to speak, found on a 'vertical' scale of value: the timeless hierarchy of different levels of being.

In early Christian writings we also find a similar contrast between what is seen and what is not seen, and the latter usually ranges over the former. But the reason for not being seen is partly different: the most valuable things are not seen *yet*, but will be exposed to sight in the end-time. The scale of value is, so to speak, horizontal, oriented along the time axis. The unseen things are the eschatological realities not yet revealed.

The contrast to the Platonic scheme is not absolute: in the here and now the eschatological things are, so to speak, stored in heaven; they are 'above'. But they are not to remain timelessly there, and one is not to bring oneself near to them by making a heavenly ascent of the intellect, as in Plato. God will bring heavenly things to earth in the end-time. Thus the Epistle to the Hebrews is more 'biblical' than Platonic when it states that 'faith is the assurance of things *hoped for*, the conviction of *things not {yet} seen* (11:1; emphasis added).'

In Origen, this 'horizontal' or eschatological dimension of the invisible world is by no means absent. He shares a lot of the typological and prophetic exegesis of the Old Testament we have found in his predecessors.⁴² But at the same time it is true that in Origen the 'vertical' dimension of the Platonic world-view tends to take first place in his theology as well as in his exegesis. This is clearly to be seen in his hermeneutical treatise on the principles of Christian exegesis in *On First Principles*, Book 4; as well as in his own exegetical practice in his innumerable commentaries and homilies.

One random example may illustrate the main points. In his homilies on Genesis, Origen comes to Gen. 26:15–33 on the numerous wells cleared by Isaac.⁴³ They had

been dug in the days of Abraham, but the Philistines had filled them with earth; Isaac and his servants now clear them of the earth and find they still contain water. The deeper meaning of this, Origen explains, is that in the days of old the servants of Abraham, that is Moses and the other biblical authors, had dug the deep and water-producing wells of scriptural revelation. In order, however, to drink of this water, one has to read the scriptures spiritually. This the Philistines (that is, the Jewish scribes and Pharisees) did not. Nor did they allow others to do so: they hated the spiritual water of scripture, and put earth in the wells. They 'put an earthly and fleshly interpretation on the Law and close up the spiritual and mystical interpretation so that neither do they themselves drink nor do they permit others to drink'. But Isaac, that is Christ, clears the wells; and not only Isaac himself – his servants the Apostles also. And they not only clear the old wells; they dig new ones: the New Testament books. The Jews also try to fill these wells with earth, i.e. interpret in a fleshly way.

But also each of us who serves the word of God digs wells and seeks 'living water,' from which he may renew his hearers. If, therefore, I too shall begin to discuss the words of the ancients and to seek in them a spiritual meaning, if I shall have attempted to remove the veil of the Law and to show that the things which have been written are allegorical, I am, indeed, digging wells. But immediately the friends of the letter will stir up malicious charges against me and will lie in ambush for me.

(Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 13)⁴⁴

Here we encounter many of Origen's basic exegetical principles. First, there is a prophetic dimension to the Old Testament text: Isaac and the events experienced by him point forward to Christ and his disciples. In fact, Origen is a master of this kind of typological interpretation. He takes Old Testament events, persons or institutions to prefigure Christ or the church; and events in the life of Christ or the church to prefigure the eschatological events; often one and the same event is seen to have analogies on all the four levels: Old Testament prefiguration; life of Jesus; life of the church; eschatological realization.

But pointing out these correspondences is only the first step in Origen's exegesis, it is not his final aim. Once the correspondence is established, it turns out that basically *the same lesson* is to be learnt from the Old Testament story and its New Testament counterpart: that lesson is the superiority of spiritual, allegorical exegesis of scriptural stories, because only this exegesis brings out the spiritual lessons that help the soul in its ethical and mystical ascent towards God. This spiritual, allegorical exegesis is valid for texts from both Testaments indiscriminately. This second step of allegorical interpretation – 'digging the well' – is 'vertically' oriented, it is part of a spiritual ascension to heavenly realms. It is not oriented along the timeline; it is not of the prophecy-fulfilment type; it does not discriminate between predictive texts in the Old Testament and fulfilment reports in the New.

The literal, historical meaning of the biblical text, the story it is *about*, corresponds to the visible realities in the Platonic world-view. The spiritual meaning of the text corresponds to the Platonic invisible world of intelligibles, the world of ideas. But how does Origen know that the biblical texts in both Testaments are to be

interpreted in this double way, literally and allegorically? He tries to substantiate this with biblical texts which – when allegorically interpreted! – seem to support such an idea. But his basic argument is this: God has placed in scripture some texts which are clearly ‘unworthy of God’ or simply illogical when taken literally. They have an allegorical sense *only*. The necessity of allegorical exegesis in these cases is a proof that allegorical exegesis is legitimate for each and every text of scripture.

Origen is plainly aware that in this argument he is making the same case as the allegorists of Homer. They, too, saw the need for allegorical interpretation in the embarrassing fact that, taken literally, the Homeric poems contained very much that was ‘unworthy of God’. And it is interesting that, like the Homeric allegorists, Origen is aware that this way of interpreting texts is by no means uncontroversial.⁴⁵ There are those who reject allegorical exegesis altogether. Origen calls them ‘carnal’, ‘simple-minded’ and ‘Jewish’, and insinuates time and again – as in our example – that the masters and instigators of carnal exegesis are the Jews. Christian literalists are, perhaps without knowing it, making common cause with the Jews.⁴⁶

Origen has, in the example we have been studying, a revealing aside which shows that he is fully aware of the Stoic–Platonic origins of his allegorical method:

If anyone who has a secular education should now hear me preaching, he is perhaps saying: ‘The things you are saying belong to us, and is the learning of our science. This very eloquence with which you discuss and teach is ours.’ And, like some Philistine, he stirs up quarrels with me saying: ‘You dug a well in my soil.’⁴⁷

It is relevant to notice that in the older Christian exegetes of the ‘proof from prophecy’ tradition we encounter no similar awareness that their *method* was controversial, or of foreign origin. Justin has no quarrel with Trypho about his interpretative techniques, only about his exegetical results. Origen, on the other hand, has frequent apologetic remarks on his method. He is painfully aware that it is not uncontested. In Justin’s days, Christian exegesis was, culturally speaking, of a ‘normal’ Jewish type, and therefore uncontroversial with regard to its techniques. In Origen’s days, Philo’s allegorism had long been extinct among the Jews Origen knew, and they and some Christians accused him of interpreting scripture with a pagan method developed for interpreting pagan myths – an accusation also made by pagans themselves, as in the above quotation.

Finally, we learn from the example of Isaac’s wells and their allegorical import that Origen’s technique allows for continuous commentary on the scriptural texts as a whole, book by book, verse by verse. Origen is the first ecclesiastical writer, as far as the evidence goes, to write complete commentaries on biblical books, and as we have seen already his basic hermeneutical principle would make him write the same sort of commentaries on the books of both Testaments.⁴⁸ The aim of Origen’s commentaries was to bring out the spiritual sense that each and every phrase of scripture, Old and New Testament, contained.

It remains to be added that Origen, as he himself was aware (as noted above), was the first Christian exegete to employ the full arsenal of antique scholarship in the field of interpretation. He carefully took all the steps required of a professional interpreter: establishing the original text, analysing the *realia* of the text, explaining

the names of places and persons, analysing the figures of speech and the rhetorical patterns in the text, etc.⁴⁹ This careful attention to the literal meaning, the *historia* of the text, its 'flesh', was not in contradiction to Origen's search for the spiritual meaning: if the concrete 'flesh' is an image of heavenly realities, each and every detail in the image is significant.

In all this Origen set a new standard of Christian biblical scholarship, and through his enormous output of commentaries and homilies left a legacy which more or less all Christian interpreters of the Bible after him interacted with, in some way or other.⁵⁰ Origen marks a high point in the field of scholarship, a high point in spiritual reading of the Bible, and also a high point in 'Hellenizing' the Christian approach to the Bible. As we have seen, the latter fact made him and his exegesis somewhat controversial already during his lifetime, and it was to remain so for a long time. But even those who opposed him in no uncertain terms, remained deeply indebted to him in their own exegetical practice, even if they tried to conceal the fact.

We see this most clearly in the greatest biblical scholar of the West, Jerome (who is profiled in Chapter 46 of this volume).⁵¹ His history with regard to Origen was dramatic: from enthusiastic admiration in his early years to bitter animosity in his later. But even in his later years, Origen remained his (often unrecognized) mentor and tutor, in questions of textual criticism as well as exegesis.⁵² When Jerome sides with Origen's opponents in later Greek exegesis – the Antiochenes (see next section) – he nevertheless incorporates many of Origen's ideas on the 'spiritual' meaning of the texts, as in his Jeremiah commentary (his last work). And when Jerome boasts of knowledge he has got from his 'Hebrew' mentor, it is sometimes really Origen he is quoting, or rather Origen's report of what *he* had learnt from his Hebrew mentor!

Apart from Jerome, Ambrose (profiled in Chapter 47 of this volume) and Hilary are the main channels of Origenistic allegorism in the West.⁵³

ALLEGORY OR *THEORIA*? THE ANTIOCHENE SCHOOL⁵⁴

As we have seen already, allegorical exegesis in general, and Origen's in particular, was by no means uncontested in its own time. The most well-known ecclesiastical opposition to Origen is not the 'simple ones' he complains about himself, but a whole group of highly skilled exegetes of the late fourth century and the early fifth, who all had their education in Syrian Antioch. The following are reckoned as the first members of this school: Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom (profiled in Chapter 45 of this volume) and Theodoret of Cyrrhus; its later members had to move east, and continued their work in Edessa and further east.

Diodore of Tarsus can to some extent be regarded the founder of the Antiochene approach. Most of his writings are lost (he was later branded a heretic); but an interesting preface from his commentary on the Psalms has come down to us, and it is from this preface that we are going to present some of the points made by the Antiochenes.

Diodore is openly hostile towards what he calls 'allegory':

Those who pretend to ‘improve’ scripture and who are wise in their own conceit have introduced allegory because they are careless about the historical substance, or they simply abuse it. They follow not the apostle’s intention [in Gal 4:28 when he uses the term ‘allegory’] but their own vain imagination, forcing the reader to take one thing for another [= Diodore’s definition of allegory]. Thus they read ‘demon’ for abyss, ‘devil’ for dragon, and so on. I stop here so that I will not be compelled to talk foolishly myself in order to refute foolishness.⁵⁵

Many scholars have felt compelled to take this at face value, and to conclude that the Antiochenes rejected allegory altogether, and instead stuck to the literal meaning of the text, the *historia*. But Diodore himself speaks about a ‘higher’ meaning to be discerned through and above the literal; he calls it *theoria*. Some scholars have tried to identify this Antiochene *theoria* with the typological exegesis of the older ‘proof from prophecy’ tradition, so that *theoria* could be translated typology.⁵⁶ But this seems not to be a precise description of the intention with the ‘theoretical’ approach of the Antiochenes. Diodore is not thinking in the terms of prediction–fulfilment; he is rather thinking in the following terms: the Psalms were worded by their authors in such a way that in their original setting some of their phrases had to be taken figuratively, as metaphors, because they contained a ‘surplus’ of meaning in that situation. But later in salvation history, the Psalms can be shown not only to remain relevant in new situations, but even to become *more* relevant, so that what was figurative in their original setting, can be taken quite literally in the New Testament setting. With other texts, much the same is true. A figurative reading of the Cain and Abel story can be shown to be very relevant for the synagogue/church conflict. But this higher sense, the *theoria*, should never be allowed to *replace* the literal *historia* of the text: in that case allegory would result. Allegory discards *historia* altogether.

‘Despite Theodore [of Mopsuestia’s] ingenious effort to dissociate *theoria* from allegory, the difference is not as clear as one might wish’ (Froehlich 1984: 22). This is no doubt true; Frances Young (1997) has tried to distinguish between the Alexandrine and the Antiochene approach partly by pointing to different Hellenistic backgrounds, partly by emphasizing subtle differences of approach resulting from this. She thinks that the Alexandrines, Origen in particular, were heavily dependent upon the *philosophical* kind of allegory. One of its characteristics was a close attention to crucial *concepts* in the text; these key concepts were the points of departure for the allegorical interpretation, which often paid little attention to the whole context or body of the text. It was inattentive to what Young calls the *iconic* qualities of the text or the narrative as a whole. The Antiochenes were less philosophical, more *rhetorical* in their approach; they had more feeling for the text as narrative, and for the narrative pattern as image of higher truths.

AUGUSTINE'S PROGRAMME FOR THE FORMATION OF AN INTERPRETER⁵⁷

Augustine, who is profiled in Chapter 48 of this volume, wrote a whole book, *On Christian Teaching* (*De doctrina Christiana*), on the noble art of scriptural interpretation and homiletical presentation.⁵⁸ The book is remarkable in more than one respect, not least because it outlines a programme for interpreters of the Bible that Augustine himself was not able to follow. In this book one of the basic requirements for the biblical interpreter is knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. Augustine's Greek was poor and he knew no Hebrew (but some Punic, another Semitic language).

In *De doctrina Christiana* one can easily discern two formative influences on Augustine as a biblical interpreter: his rhetorical education and the Origenistic tradition of spiritualistic allegorism transmitted to him mainly through Ambrose. It should perhaps be emphasized that these influences were of a different nature. His schooling in rhetoric in no way helped him with regard to a sympathetic understanding of the Old Testament; rather the contrary, as he tells us in his *Confessions*. It was not until Ambrose in his sermons unlocked the secrets of the Old Testament through his 'spiritual' (we would call it Origenistic) interpretations that Augustine was able to read this part of the Bible as divine instruction 'worthy of God':

Ambrose's ideas had already begun to appear to me defensible; and the Catholic faith, for which I supposed that nothing could be said against the onslaught of the Manicheans, I now realized could be maintained without presumption. This was especially clear after I had heard one or two parts of the Old Testament explained allegorically – whereas before this, when I had interpreted them literally, they had 'killed' me spiritually. However, when many of these passages in those books were expounded to me thus, I came to blame my own despair for having believed that no reply could be given to those who hated and scoffed at the Law and the Prophets . . . I listened with delight to Ambrose, in his sermons to the people, often recommending this text most diligently as a rule: 'The letter kills, but the spirit gives life' [2 Cor. 3:6], while at the same time he drew aside the mystic veil and opened to view the spiritual meaning of what seemed to teach perverse doctrine if it were taken according to the letter . . . As to those passages in the Scripture which had heretofore appeared incongruous and offensive to me, now that I had heard several of them expounded reasonably, I could see that they were to be resolved by the mysteries of spiritual interpretation.

(Augustine, *Confessions* 5.14.24; 6.5.6, 8)⁵⁹

This distinction between a 'literal' and a 'spiritual' or 'figurative' or 'allegorical' sense of scripture was to remain fundamental in Augustine's hermeneutic the rest of his life, and although its main field of application was the Old Testament, he could also freely allegorize gospel narratives in his sermons. But at the same time Augustine remained a rhetor, and the ideal of the rhetor was clarity of expression, not enigmatic and obscure statements. Therefore we find him stating in *De doctrina Christiana* that the enigmatic style of the sacred authors of scripture is not to be emulated by the Christian homilist or teacher.

[The biblical authors] have uttered some passages with a beneficial and salutary obscurity, to exercise and, in a sense, to polish the minds of their readers, to break down aversions and spur on the zeal of those who are anxious to learn, as well as to conceal the meaning from the minds of the wicked . . . Their interpreters [on the other hand] . . . should not speak with a similar authority, as if they are proposing themselves for interpretation, but in all their words their first and greatest endeavor should be to make themselves understood as much as possible by clearness of style.

(Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 4.8.22)⁶⁰

In general, one may observe in *De doctrina Christiana* how the rhetor, so to speak, keeps the allegorist within bounds, and never allows a neglect of the literal meaning of the biblical text. Here Augustine recommends a series of techniques and auxiliary sciences, useful for establishing the authentic text among variant readings, discerning cultural and linguistic peculiarities in the text, deciphering foreign idioms, recognizing unfamiliar *realia* in the text, etc. For this purpose, Augustine effectively proposes a Christian programme of education that would later materialize in the medieval education in the 'liberal arts': a preparatory schooling for the study proper, the study of scripture.

We should probably also hear the rhetor speaking when Augustine in *De doctrina Christiana* is very concerned to establish safe criteria for valid and invalid figurative interpretations. His fundamental criterion is a theological one: all scripture aims at strengthening the love of God and the love of neighbour; this is the final and ultimate criterion for all scriptural exegesis. Texts which cannot be seen to achieve this goal when taken literally, must be allegorized. But one should beware of judging biblical narratives too rashly in this regard. Some actions by the biblical persons which may seem immoral or offensive at first sight were actually justified and right in their own time and circumstances.

This vacillation between apology for the literal sense of scripture, and a willingness to 'save' objectionable passages by allegorical exegesis, often gives Augustine's exegetical endeavour an experimental, open-ended, unfinished character – more so than in his unrecognized mentor Origen. Augustine was always willing to reconsider earlier interpretations, to try again, and to conclude with unanswered questions (as often in his several works on Genesis).⁶¹

While finishing the *De doctrina Christiana* in his later years, Augustine had come across the hermeneutical treatise of Tyconius, a former Donatist, on how to interpret scripture (see the discussion on Tyconius in Chapter 37 of this volume). Tyconius formulated seven rules, which Augustine found helpful in establishing further criteria for legitimate spiritual exegesis. One of the basic principles of Tyconius' rules, which also corresponded with Augustine's own practice, was to refer scriptural sayings either to Christ as head of his body, or to the church as his body. Scripture itself did not necessarily make this distinction explicit, for example in many of the Psalms, where the 'I' of the Psalm could be either. If the Psalm's 'I' is confessing sin, it is the church speaking; if the 'I' is speaking in a divine capacity, it is Christ.

It remains to add a final note on Augustine the rhetor in *De doctrina Christiana*. On one point his distinction between the intended obscurity of scripture and the

intended clarity of the interpreter and preacher breaks down. Scripture after all does contain examples of eloquence that are to be emulated by the Christian teacher-preacher. Apart from a passage in Amos – exceptional in a prophet for its clarity! – it is, above all, the Pauline letters Augustine has in mind. Augustine thinks that Paul was probably not an educated orator, but he was a ‘natural’ one, and natural oratory is the best. The rhetorical handbooks, in fact, only teach what they have learnt from studying natural eloquence. Paul is one of those from whom natural eloquence may be learned, full as he is of divine wisdom and divine passion.

One perceives through this that Paul’s letters in many ways were a special case within scripture for Augustine – and not only for him. When we observe Origen interpret Paul, and John Chrysostom interpret Paul, we see skilled rhetoricians interpret texts that lend themselves easily to precisely this kind of interpretation. Here Platonic allegorization often recedes or disappears altogether, and instead a rhetorical analysis of the text is presented that almost allows the modern, also rhetorically schooled exegete, to have the feeling he or she is reading an ancient colleague, a worthy discussion partner.⁶²

Augustine never states it, but one could perhaps ‘explain’ Paul’s exception to the rule of scripture’s general enigmatic and non-rhetorical quality, by saying that in his letters Paul is primarily not an *author* of scripture, but an *interpreter* of scripture; or perhaps he is both. Therefore he *should* display that clarity and eloquence Augustine demands from the ordinary expositor and teacher of scripture.

Be that as it may. Our last remarks on Paul in the biblical exegesis of the old church, may serve as a sobering reminder that when we often treat ‘scripture’ more or less as one whole of a uniform nature, and therefore also the big questions of interpretative principles as questions valid for the whole of scripture, we are guilty of a simplification. A more nuanced picture would result if we treated the different categories and genres of biblical books separately. That would, of course, require more space than has been at our disposal here.

CONCLUSION

There was a distinctively Christian interpretation of the Jewish scriptures (called by Christians the Old Testament). Its distinctiveness had to do, inevitably, with the Christological ‘key’ early Christians applied to the old scriptures. From a methodological point of view, however, the earliest Christian exegesis was hardly much different from that of other Jewish ‘schools’ at the time. It was Jewish and Hellenistic at the same time, like that of the other schools.

With Origen as the watershed figure, Christian interpretation of the Bible was acculturated into a wider, more general setting in the early third century. The Bible of two Testaments was to replace the Homeric canon of Hellenistic culture; interpreted along the same allegorical lines as the rival canon of Homer. The project was begun, based primarily on the Law as sacred text, by Philo the Jew in the early first century CE, and brought to its mature completion by Origen in the third.

After Origen, Christian scholars of the Bible faced the challenge of digesting Origen’s new approach and daring interpretations, at the same time preserving the

valuable heritage of the older ‘testimony’ approach, balancing or integrating the two, or creating new syntheses. In all of this, Christian interpretation of the Bible was ‘contextualized’ to a remarkable degree, as we have tried to show.

NOTES

- 1 For comprehensive and succinct surveys of biblical interpretation in the period 70–430 CE, see, for example, Hanson (1970), Schäfer (1980: 25–60), Grant and Tracy (1984: 28–82), Froehlich (1984: 1–29), Horbury (1988), Reventlow (1990: 50–201), Simonetti (1994: 1–109) and Young (1997: 285–99).
- 2 See the comprehensive treatment in Patte (1975).
- 3 See especially the fundamental study of Daube (1949).
- 4 Attributed to rabbi Levi (c. 300 CE) in *Pesikta* 49B and *Midrash Samuel* 45B; to rabbi Isaac (also c. 300) in *Midrash Kobelet* 9B; cf. Strack and Billerbeck (1928: I, 69f.).
- 5 For two incisive studies of this principle at work in the New Testament, see Goppelt (1939) and Bruce (1968).
- 6 Brewer (1992) found no undisputable example of this *haggadic* exegesis in the pre-70 rabbinic material, but recognized its presence in Qumran and Philo. One could add that it is also evidenced in the New Testament.
- 7 For an updated bibliography on the most important studies, see Hübner (1996: 332f.).
- 8 *Tosephta Sukka* 3:11ff., cf.; Strack and Billerbeck (1928: III; 406f.) for more rabbinic parallels. The same *haggada* seems to be known to the author of *Biblical Antiquities* (10.7), in the period between the two Jewish wars (70–132 CE). In identifying the rock with Christ, Paul may presuppose a Jewish tradition identifying the rock with God’s Wisdom.
- 9 Irenaeus, (*Adversus Haereses* [Against Heresies] 5.36.3); ANF translation Vol. I: 567.
- 10 On this rabbinic debate, see the excellent excursus of Paul Billerbeck ‘Diese Welt, die Tage des Messias und die zukünftige Welt [This world, the days of the Messiah and the future world]’, in Strack and Billerbeck IV, (1928: 799–976).
- 11 *Babylonian Talmud*, *Sanhedrin* 99A (my translation).
- 12 See Patte (1975: 299–308) and Maier (1996: 126–9).
- 13 This continuity extends beyond Justin. A. von Ungern-Sternberg (1913) followed the proof-from-prophecy until and inclusive of Eusebius of Caesarea, and concluded by emphasizing ‘the stability of the scriptural proof tradition’ (294–304).
- 14 *Der Schriftbeweis* – differentiated by von Ungern-Sternberg into ‘proof of Christ’ and ‘proof of the gospel’ – in perfect agreement with Luke 24:45ff.
- 15 For more on this connection between scriptural proof and emerging creed, see Skarsaune (1987b).
- 16 For detailed argument, see Skarsaune (1987a: 260–2).
- 17 See von Ungern-Sternberg (1913: 27–144, 169–220) Skarsaune (1996a: 421–42).
- 18 See De Margerie (1980: 165–87) and Van Rompay (1996: 619–22 [on Aphrahat] and 622–8 [on Ephrem]).
- 19 See Skarsaune (1990: 210f.).
- 20 They also evince another characteristic of Jewish scribal culture: the ‘free’ or allusive quotation of scripture. Cf. Skarsaune (1990: 210f.) and Stanley (1997).
- 21 See Skarsaune (1990) for a fuller treatment of this theme.
- 22 See Skarsaune (1996a: 418–21), with references to further literature on the testimony book hypothesis.

- 23 My translation.
- 24 Translation according to Hall (1979: 17–19).
- 25 Young (1997: 144–52, 184, 210–11).
- 26 For a more detailed treatment of the argument in this and the foregoing paragraphs, see Skarsaune (1996a: 389–442).
- 27 On Hippolytus' exegesis in general, cf. Simonetti (1994: 26–31); on his 'extension' of the 'testimony' approach into complete commentary, cf. also Daniélou (1973: 257–71) and Skarsaune (1996a: 434–7).
- 28 Translation, Falls (1965: 66f.).
- 29 Especially see the fine study of Droge (1989).
- 30 On Tertullian's Old Testament exegesis, see De Margerie (1983a: 23–640) and Skarsaune (1996a: 429–34 [with further bibliography]).
- 31 For reviews of Irenaeus' Old Testament exegesis, see De Margerie (1980: 64–84), Schäfer (1980: 32–5), Reventlow (1990: 150–70), Skarsaune (1996a: 422–9 [with further bibliography]) and Jourjon (1997).
- 32 Contrary to much current scholarly opinion, there is hardly any trace of anything approaching canonical status for the so-called Apocrypha in the first and second centuries CE. The thesis of a larger "Alexandrian" canon taken over by the early church has been successfully refuted by Sundberg (1964); see also Skarsaune (1996b). In the third century Origen discusses the status of some of the Apocrypha, from then onwards one can observe that several Greek Fathers do not include the Apocrypha in their lists of canonical books, but often the same Fathers sometimes quote them as scripture. In the West Augustine says that the "learned" have a more narrow canon, while ecclesiastical tradition has a wider; Jerome confirms this in his own attitude. He basically advocates the Jewish canon, but has to yield to requests from church members who want him to include the Apocrypha in his translation project. (See more on this in Sundberg 1964.)
- 33 The depiction of the biblical (and some post-biblical) scenes in the two registers of the front panels seems to be based on juxtaposition of biblical types: in the centre we find Christ in both registers, in the lower his entry into earthly Jerusalem, in the upper his enthronement in heavenly Jerusalem. In the upper register the enthroned Christ is flanked by Christ's arrest to the right, and its 'post-figure' in Peter's arrest to the left. The uttermost panels in the top row depict the sacrifice of Isaac to the left (Old Testament type), and Pilate's judgement of Christ (realization of type) to the right. In the lower row the triumphant Christ is flanked by Adam and Eve succumbing to temptation at the left, and Daniel victorious over temptation in the lion's den to the right – one negative anti-type and one positive type of Christ's victory over sin and death. The uttermost panels in this row are also typological: Job (left) was nearly sacrificed as a pre-figure of Christ, Paul was sacrificed imitating Christ. There are also other cross-connections in the sequence of the panels. In between the panels of the front, and on the lid and ends of the sarcophagus, are other decorative elements that enrich and frame the motives of the front panels. For a full analysis, see Malbon (1990).
- 34 On the biblical material in *1 Clement*, see Hagner (1973).
- 35 Among the gnostics we even hear about a full-fledged commentary: Heracleon's on John (somewhat after 150 CE), which Origen quoted extensively to refute it in his own commentary on John.
- 36 See Pagels (1975).
- 37 Especially on Tertullian's exegesis, see Waszink (1979).
- 38 Comprehensive reviews of Clement's and Origen's exegesis: Daniélou (1973: 237–56, 273–88), De Margerie (1980: 95–136), Schäfer (1980: 40–4), Grant and Tracy (1984:

- 52–62), Reventlow (1990: 170–93), Simonetti (1994: 34–48) and Carleton Paget (1996).
- 39 See Coulter (1976: 19–31), Dawson (1992: 23–72), Siegert (1996: 130–9) and Procopé (1996).
- 40 The literature on Philo as biblical interpreter is vast; for three recent treatments with full bibliographies, see Dawson (1992: 73–126), Siegert (1996: 162–88) and Borgen (1997).
- 41 On Origen and his exegesis, cf. the literature in note 38, and in addition Hanson (1959).
- 42 Cf. the excellent review of Origen's 'organisation of typology' in Daniélou 1973: (275–80).
- 43 An English translation is to be found in Heine (1982: 185–95).
- 44 Translation according to Heine (1982: 189).
- 45 On rejection of allegory in secular Hellenism, see Dawson (1992: 52–72).
- 46 On the opponents of Origen as scriptural literalists, see Hällström (1984: 43–57).
- 47 See Hällström (1984: 189–90).
- 48 In this, he is very different from Hippolytus, the only known ecclesiastical writer before him to write commentaries on Old Testament books, as noted on p. 671.
- 49 On Origen's enormous text-critical project, the so-called Hexapla, see, for example, Trigg (1983: 82–6). On Origen's 'philological' scholarship in general, see Neuschäfer (1987) and Young (1997: 82–96).
- 50 The classic study of this is Von Harnack (1918/19).
- 51 On Jerome's exegesis, see the following surveys: Sparks (1970), Schäfer (1980: 48–50), De Margerie (1983b: 145–79), Simonetti (1994: 99–103) and Kieffer (1996). See also the more extensive treatment in Brown (1992).
- 52 See Kelly (1975: 220ff., 290–4, 298–308, 316ff.).
- 53 On these Fathers, see De Margerie (1983a: 65–143), and Jacob (1996).
- 54 For general reviews of the exegesis of the Antiochene school, see Kelly (1973: 75–8), De Margerie (1980: 188–240), Schäfer (1980: 44–8), Grant and Tracy (1984: 63–72), Simonetti (1994: 59–63) and Hidal (1996 [with further bibliography]).
- 55 Quoted from the translation in Froehlich (1984: 82–6; quotation 86).
- 56 So, to some extent, (Kelly 1973: 75–8).
- 57 On Augustine as an interpreter, see Bonner (1970), De Margerie (1983b), Wright (1996) and Young (1997: 265–84).
- 58 On Augustine's principles of exegesis according to the *Doctrina*, see Teske (1995) and Dawson (1995).
- 59 Translation, Outler (1995: 111, 117–19).
- 60 According to the translation of Gavigan (1947: 187–8).
- 61 For details on this, see Wright (1996: 704–9).
- 62 In Gorday (1983) Origen, John Chrysostom and Augustine are brought in as interesting outsiders and counterpoints to the modern 'Romans debate', especially concerning the role of Romans 9–11 within Romans as a whole. It turns out that Origen is very much in touch with the modern debate!

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PART VI

THE ARTISTIC HERITAGE



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ARCHITECTURE: THE FIRST FIVE CENTURIES



L. Michael White

By the time the early Christians began to build monumental church buildings, during the reign of Constantine the Great (313–37 CE), there had been a recognizable, public religious architecture in the Graeco-Roman world for over a millennium. Yet, the Christians did not adopt a traditional Greek or Roman style of temple architecture for their churches. Instead, they adapted the basilica. Modelled after a standard type of audience hall used by municipal courts and imperial administrators, the basilica effectively became the norm and hence the rootstock for the evolution of all later types of Christian architecture down to modern times. To understand the forces of tradition and change at work in this religious arena is critical to understanding the development of early Christianity itself. There are important implications in terms of Christianity's social location, its liturgical evolution, and its self-understanding.

Because of this distinctive role in Christian history, it has been suggested that the basilica was a radical departure from the religious architecture of the pagan world, a symbol of the triumph of Christianity over its environment (MacDonald 1977: 12). Christianity's religious architecture, it is thus argued, avoided the sacralization of objects and places typical of pagan temples and shrines.¹ In reality, however, the story is more complex; the cultural disjunctures less clear. The evolution of a typically Christian architecture was a long process that reflected the appropriation of traditional Jewish as well as pagan forms and practices. Local traditions and influences abound, especially in the earlier stages. Prior to the time of Constantine, there was no normative Christian architecture in any strict sense. One could not walk down the streets of Rome, Corinth, or Carthage and pick out a Christian church by its distinctive plan or façade. There was not yet an iconography of architectural planning that had become identifiably Christian. Features that seem familiar today, such as steeples and stained-glass windows, were still a millennium away as symbolic markers of Christian religious architecture.

In the age of Constantine, then, Christianity developed its first normative public expression of religious architecture after nearly three centuries of social evolution. For this reason, the study of the origins and development of early Christian architecture is usually broken into two main chronological phases: that before the time of

Constantine and that after. In examining this process, then, we shall take up the material as follows:

1. The architectural environment: public and private
 - (a) 'Public' religion: temples in classical Greece and Rome
 - (b) Domestic space and 'private' religion
 - (c) Foreign religions and architectural adaptation
2. From houses to church buildings: Paul to Constantine
 - (a) The synagogue and Diaspora Judaism
 - (b) The house—church
 - (c) The *domus ecclesiae* and architectural adaptation
 - (d) The *aula ecclesiae*
3. The birth of the basilica: the fourth and fifth centuries
 - (a) Constantine's building programme
 - (b) Local and regional variations
 - (c) Other types of Christian architecture: martyria and baptisteries
 - (d) The Christian landscape of late Roman cities

THE ARCHITECTURAL ENVIRONMENT: PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

For people living in the Hellenistic-Roman world the norms of religious architecture would have been well known and readily recognizable both in the public and private spheres. None the less, there are some key differences between the religious environments of classical Greece and imperial Rome that must be noted.²

'Public' Religion: temples in classical Greece and Rome

From the late archaic to the Hellenistic period (seventh to third centuries BCE) the centre of religious life in a Greek city became the monumental podium temples associated with particular deities or mythic foundations. The interior *cella*, surrounded by one or more colonnades, housed the statue of the deity; it was tended by a coterie of professional priests often assisted by city magistrates, leading citizens, and other individuals. A cycle of festivals, processions, and sacrifices were managed by the priests and the city as part of its ritual calendar. As at Athens, the most important temples were often set up on the citadel of the city, called the *acropolis* (or 'upper city'). In some cases, however, the principal sanctuary might be otherwise set apart from the main city, as in the case of the temple of Ephesian Artemis, especially after the city was relocated in Hellenistic times. Other temples, smaller sanctuaries and shrines, and altars were spread about the areas of the *agora* (or 'marketplace') and other important or sacred localities, such as springs, civic boundaries, and the like. Religious architecture from great to small emulated the iconography of temples and was a part of the civic landscape.

In classical Greek religion, however, there were numerous other sanctuaries that were not exclusively associated with a single city. Often they were associated with

places of awe and majesty or with important mythic events, as in the case of the oracular sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi, the temple of Zeus at Olympia, the sacred precincts of Apollo at Delos, the sanctuary of Apphaia on Aegina, the temple complex of Poseidon and Athena at Cape Sounion, or the Telesterion or sanctuary of the mysteries at Eleusis. Some of these came to be closely linked at times with Athenian political control, yet they retained their mystique even after Athens' decline. Centuries later a host of travelling Romans – emperors and senators, Herod and Paul – still knew them as sacred places and favourite tourist destinations. From Hellenistic times other important sanctuaries also developed, such as those associated with the hero and healing god Asclepius that grew up at Epidaurus, Kos, and Pergamum. Then there were lesser shrines that dotted the landscape, such as Herms used to mark key locations, sacred groves, or the tomb of a local hero (called a *Heröon*). Finally, there were the shrines and religious appurtenances of the household itself. Thus, Greek religion had a continuity of expressions across the public and private spheres that integrated the cultural ideals of Greek society.

The monumental temples of ancient Rome were influenced by both Etruscan and Greek architectural traditions (cf. Edlund-Berry 1988). By the second century BCE Rome had developed its own norms of city planning and sacred architecture. A Roman temple complex (literally a sacred precinct) centred on a podium temple, but traditionally without peripteral colonnades. Elevated several steps, the *cella* enclosed the sides of the podium with a colonnade along the façade only. Round temples with colonnades were also used, and gradually Greek temple styles with peripteral colonnade became more prominent in Rome.

While temples and sanctuaries might be inside or outside the walls of a Roman city, the *pomerium* (or boundary) of the city also marked a sacred enclosure; burials, for example, were usually prohibited within the *pomerium*. Roman city planning was oriented around the forum. By the second century BCE it was typically dominated by a temple of the Capitoline gods (Jupiter, Juno, Minerva), also called the *Capitolium*. The foundation and siting of a temple required the assent of religious officials (the *collegium pontificum*) and the Senate (Stambaugh 1978, 1988). Temples for other deities were then located according to traditional functions and events. New temples, sanctuaries, and altars were introduced with regularity in the republican period and even more frequently during the empire.

In the Hellenistic and Roman world temples functioned as banks, social welfare agencies, places of political sanctuary, and the centres of public festivals and processions. The sacred precincts accommodated crowds of people on special holy days or when particular rituals and sacrifices – 'liturgies' (*leitourgiai*) in Greek, 'offices' (*officia*) in Latin – were performed. Often major festivals functioned as civic banquets, and sacrifices were publically distributed as part of the festivities. Yet, a temple in the strict sense, as the house of a god (the *cella* in architectural terms), was not normally a place for public assembly or religious 'worship' in any modern sense. The order of procedures for acts of worship and devotion, whether for major festivals or for individual devotion, at most temples was carefully prescribed. In Greek religion there were few exceptions where a gathering of people was convened in a large hall as part of a religious ceremony. One such was the Greater Mysteries, the annual ritual of initiation celebrated at the Telesterion of Eleusis. Otherwise, most

corporate religious activity of a public nature was conducted out of doors in processions and festival activities. A number of ancient Greek and Roman temples (such as the sanctuary of Demeter at Corinth or the sanctuaries of Asclepius) made provision for smaller groups to gather in dining rooms in the temple complex, but not in the temple-*cella* proper. On the other hand, both Greeks and Romans viewed the civic assembly (*ekklesiā* and *curia*, respectively)³ as sacred gatherings, and their architecture reflected this sacralization.

Domestic space and 'private' religion

While the elements of such public and official religious activities, and their architectural forms, were monumental and distinctive in style, the continuum between public and private forms of religiosity was not clearly differentiated in the Hellenistic-Roman world. In contrast to modern cultural distinctions between public/civic and private/domestic, a number of recent archaeological and cultural studies have shown that many elements of domestic life were considered part of the public sphere (Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 1995; Laurence 1994, 1995, 1997). *Compita* (or 'crossroads' shrines) marked key sections of the city, including voting districts (the *vici*) or neighbourhoods (Bakker 1994). Domestic religion and the household shrine (or *lararium*) stood at the intersection between these spheres of activity, especially where key social rituals (patronage, hospitality, and dining) were concerned (Orr 1978; Clark 1991; Wallace-Hadrill 1997; Foss 1997; Osiek and Balch 1997: 5–47; White 1998: 177–81).

Apart from the family, the most important social groupings in Roman cities were the guilds and clubs (Latin: *collegia* or *sodalicia*; Greek: *thiasoi*). Comprised of people in a common trade, veterans, ethnic enclaves, or funerary societies for the freeborn poor, they afforded social cohesion and networks of support for members of the group. Guilds and *collegia* participated in regular public festivals, often in some special capacity. Yet the majority of their religious activities were conducted in a non-public arena, usually in dinner gatherings for their members. Most had a patron deity or deities, frequently with a special shrine or a private temple set aside within the society's headquarters (sometimes called a *schola*). Dining halls were another common feature. Their banquets were frequently accompanied by sacrifices and other acts of piety by the group or its individual members. Such communal gatherings could at times find their way into the precincts of the public temples, but most often kept to the more private confines of their own buildings.

In the Hellenistic world these collegial halls typically resembled domestic architecture, as in the case of the 'Association of Merchants and Shippers from Berytus' who in the second century BCE established a headquarters in the important trade centre of Delos. Based on the grandiose inscription from the peristyle of their building, their hall was known as the 'House of the Poseidoniasts from Berytus'. Their patron deity, Greek Poseidon, was an amalgamation with their local form of Ba'al from Syria. Architecturally the building resembles a house with a typical peristyle court and a large room for assembly. Instead of regular domestic quarters, however, it featured a separate room with altars and statues of the gods (Picard 1921; Bruneau 1970: 623–4).

From the Roman period we find analogous groups, such as the Tyrian merchants at Puteoli who maintained a collegial hall and sanctuary dedicated to their ancestral god (Ba'al of Serapta), whom they called by the Hellenized name Helios Seraptenos (Nock 1939: 66; White 1996–7: I, 32). At Ostia we find the *collegium* of the *Fabri Navales* (the Ship-builders Guild), whose headquarters (III.2.2) was located along the main street, the *Decumanus maximus*, a few blocks west of the forum. The edifice (Figure 27.1, locus A) was installed in a lot previously occupied by a typical private house: the peristyle was turned into a small *temenos* (sacred enclosure), with the *cella* proper set on a podium in the area previously occupied by the *tablinum* (or main living room) of the house. The rear areas of the complex were used for other activities and gatherings of the group (Meiggs 1973: 327; Hermansen 1981: 63).

Immediately across the street hall (see Figure 27.1, locus B) stood another collegial hall (IV.5.15). Usually known as the 'School of Trajan' (*Schola Traiani*) it probably belonged to the 'Shipowners Association' (*Naviculariei*).⁴ Their building similarly took over and renovated a large peristyle house dating from the early first century CE; the reconstruction dates to the late second century CE. In addition to offices, an imperial shrine, a large peristyle court with central fountain (a nymphaeum), and porticoes, the rear of the complex contained a large and richly decorated dining hall with an apsidal niche for a statue of Fortuna. For such groups social interaction, especially banquets, were closely aligned with their religious activities.

Like the headquarters of the *Fabri Navales*, a number of these guild halls at Ostia clearly included small temples within their confines, even though the buildings themselves came from the realm of domestic architecture.⁵ Some groups adopted explicitly religious designations such as the obscure group known only from inscriptions as 'The Order of the Guildbrothers who contributed funds for enlargement of the temple' (Meiggs 1973: 335; Hermansen 1981: 59, 241). Two further cases known from epigraphic remains reflect this continuum between public and private arenas of religious activity. One is the household of Pompeia Agripinilla which in c. 127 CE was organized as a cult of Dionysus; the nearly 500 members of her household were called 'initiates' (Greek: *mystai*) and were assigned hierarchically to ranks and offices within the 'cult.' Agripinilla, the *mater familias*, held the highest rank as priest and patron of the cult (White 1996–7: I, 45, with references). From Rome another inscription refers to 'the Association which is in the house of Sergia Paullina' (*Collegium quod est in domu Sergiae Paullinae*, CIL 6.9148). In the former case the household is identical to the cult; in the latter, it appears that the *collegium* meets in the house of the patron, likely overlapping somewhat with the household but not entirely.⁶

Foreign religions and architectural adaptation

Beginning in Hellenistic times there was a growing trend for new religious groups to move into the urban environment alongside the traditional cults. These new groups came from the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East in the wake of Alexander's conquests and the subsequent centuries of Hellenistic rule. By the first century BCE these regions came under Roman rule, but by then the pathways of migration and cultural interaction had been well worn. As with the shippers and



Figure 27.1 Ostia: regions III and IV along the Decumanus Maximus. From White (1996–7: II. fig. 41).

merchants on Delos in the Hellenistic period and those at Puteoli and Ostia in the imperial age, many people were drawn by trade and migration to the large cities. With them they carried their cultural heritage and their religious traditions. Their collegial halls thus served both as commercial agencies and as religious and social centres.

Once out of the realm of the official cults associated with the state or the city, there was much more variety in religious activity and in its architectural forms. Dining and social functions were closely linked to religious activities. Houses might be turned into cult centres or collegial halls. A wealthy homeowner might also install his/her own private 'chapel' in honour of a favourite deity or as part of a small religious confraternity. For example at Ephesus, a wealthy city official (*alytarch*) of the early second century CE, named C. Flavius Furius Aptus, owned a palatial house (*Hanghaus* 2) along the *Embolos* (or Processional Way). Off a peristyle court reached from a mosaic portico along the street, he installed a small apsidal shrine to Dionysus next to an opulent dining hall. It seems that these rooms were meant for formal entertaining of small elite groups (Wiplinger and Wlach 1995: 103–4).

Similarly, at Rome a group using the collegial title 'Association of the Treebearers' (*Collegium Dendrophorum*) met in an apsidal hall in the house of its patron, Manius Publicius Hilarus, who lived on the Caelian. Though located in a domestic setting, the hall was marked off by a formal inscription of dedication and invocation (*CIL* 6.641, 30973). It would appear that this was a private cultic association loosely tied to the cult of Magna Mater, but it maintained its own distinct social and religious functions apart from the public cult (White 1996–7: I, 46). Architectural adaptation and renovation was the order of the day, and such groups relied on the patronage of leading individuals.

It seems that many of the so-called 'mystery cults' made their way into the Hellenistic and Roman world by means of architectural adaptation and private patronage, either before or alongside of establishing formal public temples of classical design. A common phenomenon, this practice was especially noteworthy in the case of the cults of the Egyptian gods, where communal dining was a prominent feature (White 1996–7: I, 32–9, 43–6). The cult of Mithras, which became popular in the Roman world in the second century CE, developed a distinctive type of religious architecture for its sanctuaries, called *mithraea* (Figure 27.2).

There was a typical plan for most *mithraea* in the Roman world. In imitation of a cave, the *mithraeum* was usually a long narrow hall with elevated benches along the two side walls and a central aisle leading to an altar platform at one end. On the side benches the members of the cult assembled, socialized, and ate communal dinners. The halls might be decorated with religious art and symbols, but the altar platform, usually decorated with mythic scenes of Mithras slaying the bull (or *tauroctony*) served as the focus of attention and cultic actions.

Despite these common features, the actual design and architecture of each *mithraeum* might be vastly different owing to the fact that most of them were quite small and usually constructed from or within some existing building (White 1996–7: I, 47–50). Very few ancient *mithraea* were *de novo* or purpose-built edifices for religious purposes; the vast majority (nearly 90%) of excavated *mithraic* buildings were created by renovation and architectural adaptation of houses, baths, *cryptoportici*, warehouses, vaulted storerooms, courtyards, and even *nymphaea* (White 1996–7: I, 48; II, no. 87). All of the known *mithraea* from Rome and Ostia were renovated from existing buildings. In some cases the renovations were minimal (White 1996–7: II, no. 79). In other cases they could be quite extensive, with lavish decorations

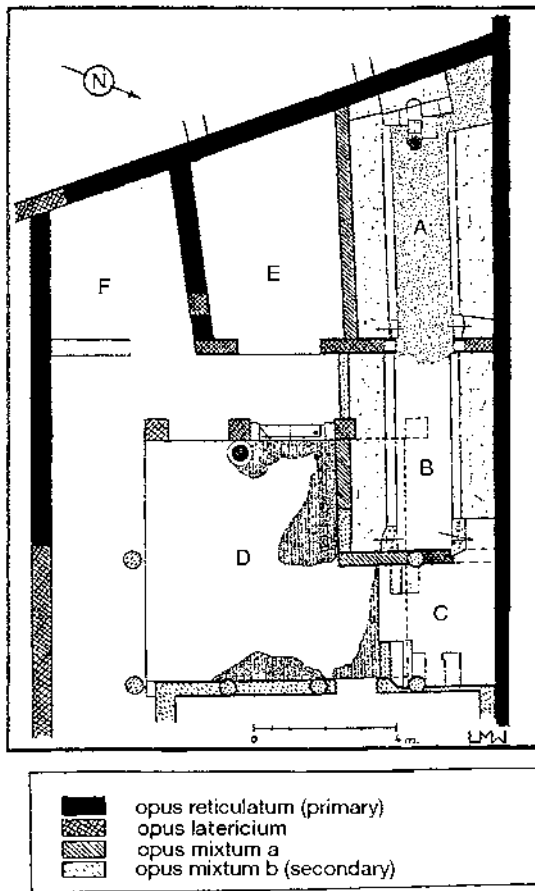


Figure 27.2 Plan of the Mithraeum of the Painted Walls in Ostia – ‘Mitreo delle pareti dipinte’. From White (1996–7: II, fig. 42; adapted from Becatti, *Mitrei Ostia*).

and multiple stages of enlargement (White 1996–7: I, 49–52; II, nos. 59, 79, 81, 89). For example, the ‘Mithraeum of the Painted Walls’ (Figure 27.2; and Figure 27.1, locus C) at Ostia (III.1.6) was constructed in two stages in the courtyard and a side room of a house (White 1996–7: II, no. 81). Similarly, at Rome, the mithraeum found beneath the apse of San Clemente (Figures 27.3, 27.14) had been installed in the second or third century in the cortile of a private house; before renovation the same space had been used as a nymphaeum (White 1996–7: II, no. 87).

What sets the mithraic cult apart architecturally from other traditional religions of the Hellenistic-Roman world is the lack of a formal temple architecture apart from these small sanctuaries. Still, they participated in public temple activities as part of daily life, even though their own cultic dining and social activities took place within the sanctuary. In this sense it was more ‘private’, both in setting and in operations, despite the fact that a limited iconography of architecture had evolved.

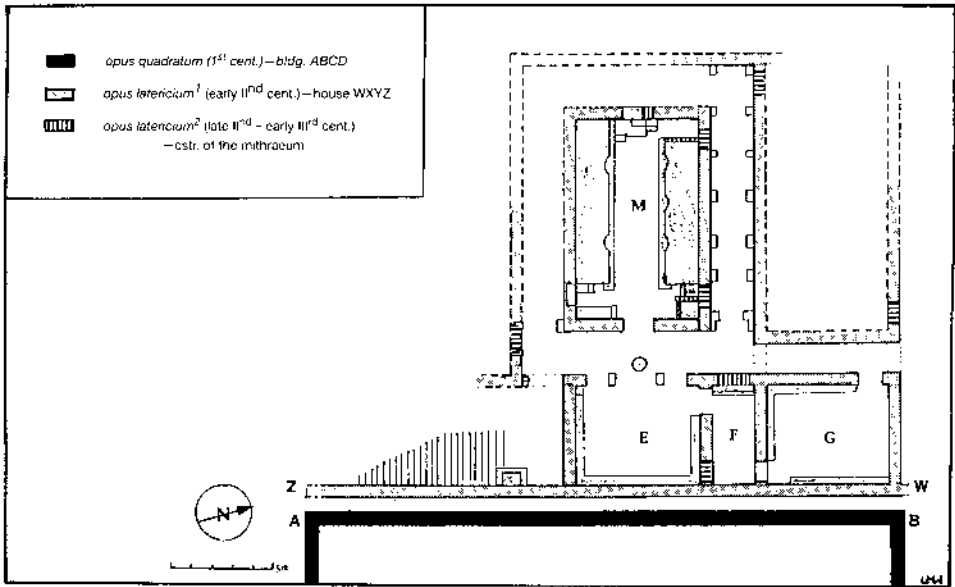


Figure 27.3 Plan of the San Clemente Mithraeum, Rome. From White (1996–7: II, fig. 44; after Guidobaldi).

In some ways it was closer to a *collegium*, even though it was publicly recognized as a religion by Roman standards. As with most other forms of religious architecture, public or private, the bulk of construction, renovation, and decoration fell to the private acts of devotion of individual members, and especially to the wealthy. They usually functioned as patrons and leaders within the cultic community (White 1996–7: I, 53–7).

FROM HOUSES TO CHURCH BUILDINGS: PAUL TO CONSTANTINE

In its earliest stages the Christian movement was not a separate religion but a sect within first-century Judaism. As such it observed the rhythms of religious life in the same way as other Jews; therefore, in terms of architecture the centre of religious identity was the temple at Jerusalem. The temple was rebuilt and enlarged extensively under the Hasmoneans and even more under Herod the Great; Herodian construction continued from c. 20 BCE down to 62 CE, not long before the outbreak of the war that would see it finally destroyed in 70 CE. It was a centre of sacrificial activity and national identity; it was an architectural showpiece set in an elevated position within the 'sacred' city, Zion. The area surrounding the Jewish temple (the outer courts, or 'Court of the Gentiles') was a gathering place for religious festivals and other public and commercial activities. Jewish men alone could approach the entrance to the building through the inner courts, but the temple proper, and

especially its inner sanctum, was restricted to the priests alone. In this sense, it functioned much like other ancient temples. Despite the fact that no Jew would say that their God actually lived there, it was still conceived as the place where God's presence dwelt as a symbol of national election.

According to the New Testament, the first followers of the Christian movement continued in traditional forms of Jewish piety, attending the temple, observing annual feasts and purity rules.⁷ As such they initially had no need of other forms of religious architecture, especially since the movement was limited to a Jewish following in the Homeland (White 1996–7: I, 102–3). Like other Jewish sects, these earliest Christians also met in homes for private meals, fellowship, and prayer (Acts 2–5). The Pharisees were another Jewish group that used homebased fellowships as a locus for study and prayer alongside the normal religious functions of the temple.⁸ Only after the temple was destroyed in 70 CE would the synagogue emerge as the new centre of Jewish worship and identity.⁹ A normative synagogue architecture and liturgy did not evolve until the fourth century CE as part of the consolidation of rabbinic Judaism. Consequently, it did not serve as the architectural model for the development of Christian architecture, the basilica in particular, as has sometimes been supposed.¹⁰

The synagogue and Diaspora Judaism

Early on synagogues were usually just called 'prayerhalls' (Greek: *proseuchai*). In the Homeland prior to 70 CE they are known from scant references of Josephus (*JW* 2.285–9; *JA* 19.300–305; *Life* 277–80) and early Christian writings (the Gospels and Acts); however, it is significant that all were authored well after the war. Only in Philo (*De vita Mosis* 2.215–16; *De legibus specialibus* 2.62) do we find securely dated pre-70 references, but these come from the Alexandrian Jewish community, not the Homeland (Grabbe 1995: 20–1).

Archaeological evidence for pre-70 synagogues is even more perplexing, since it now appears that the vast majority date to the centuries after the First Revolt; they occur either from the Galilee or from provisions for Diaspora Jews. Moreover, these cases arise only in the post-Hasmonean period, i.e., late first century BCE, or later (Grabbe 1995: 21–3; Flesher 1995: 30–4). By contrast, archaeological and epigraphic evidence points to the origins of Jewish prayerhalls in the second and first centuries BCE in Ptolemaic Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean Diaspora (Grabbe 1995: 18–19; Griffiths 1995; White 1987). In other words, the synagogue originated in regions away from Judaea, where access to the temple was limited. In the Diaspora it functioned as a social as well as religious centre, and there was neither a fixed liturgy nor architecture in the pre-70 period (Kasher 1995; White 1987).

When we look at the archaeological remains of Diaspora synagogues (Figure 27.4) we discover that all were adapted from previously existing buildings, usually over several phases of renovation and development (Figure 27.5).

There are six such edifices known of that date (Figure 27.5), at least in part, from the pre-Constantinian period. Listed in more or less chronological order for their earliest phases, they are: Delos (second-first century BCE), Ostia, Dura-Europos,

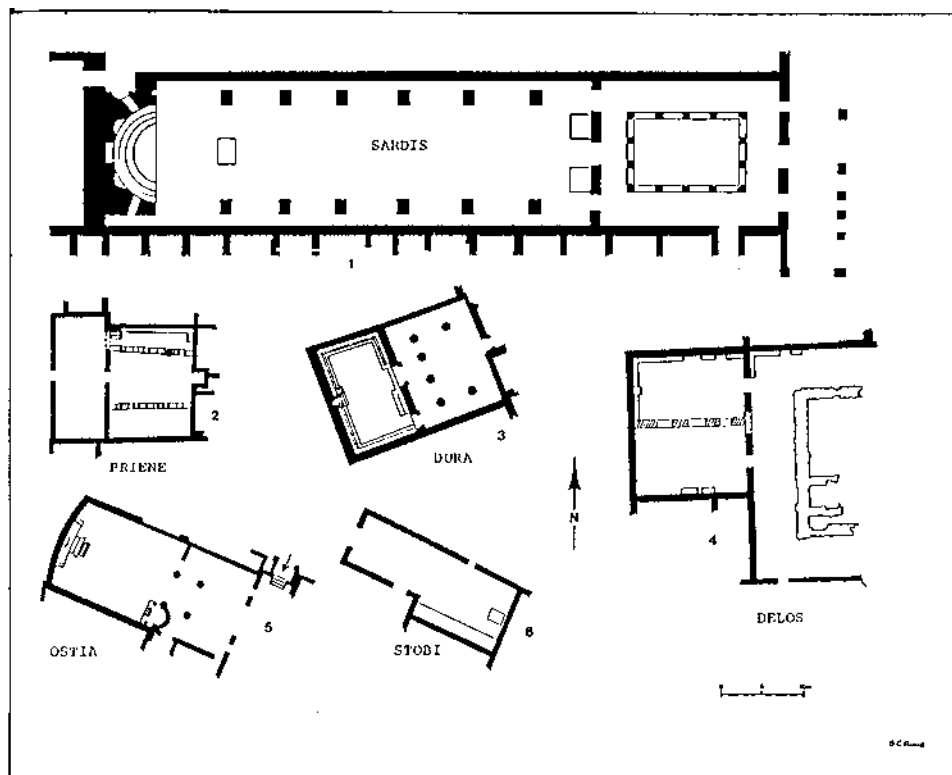


Figure 27.4 Synoptic plan of six Diaspora synagogues. From White (1996–7: I, Fig. 9).

Priene (second century CE), Stobi (third century CE), and Sardis (third-fourth centuries CE). Of these six, four were clearly renovated from existing private houses, and one (Ostia) was likely some sort of insula complex. The Sardis synagogue, the largest known from antiquity (see also Figure 27.22), was renovated in at least three distinct phases from a municipal bath-gymnasium complex (Kraabel 1979; White 1996–7: I, 60–77, II, nos. 60, 66, 69, 70, 72, 83).

Both the archaeological and epigraphic record from these edifices attest to the significant role played by patrons, both men and women, in their growth and architectural development (White 1996–7: I, 77–93; Brooten 1982). The fundamental role of patronage in the Mediterranean world of this time is discussed in Chapter 1 of this volume. In many ways the use of space, and the social organization of these communities, most resembles that of other religious clubs or *collegia*, especially during the Roman period (White 1987, 1997; Richardson 1996). Three further points are worth noting in the architectural development of these edifices. First, as A.T. Kraabel (1981: 89) has noted, the form of these buildings and their adaptation was determined by local social and economic conditions more than by any architectural norms (cf. White 1996–7: I, 93–101). The Dura-Europos synagogue is a good example since we can see its evolution from an ordinary house in the

<i>Site</i>	<i>No. of phases</i>	<i>Building type</i>	<i>Dates*</i>	<i>First Synagogue phase date</i>
SYRIA Dura-Europos	3	¹ house ² renov.synag.i ³ renov.synag.cmplx. ^{3a} paintings	Late I c. 150–200 244/5	2/c. 150– 200
LYDIA Sardis	4	¹ apodyterion ² hall ³ synag./court ^{4a} refurb.	c. 166 late-II beg.-III IV	3/III
Priene	3	^{1–2} house ³ renov.synag.	I BCE	3/II
INSULAE AEGEAE Delos	2	¹ house ² synag. ^{2a} refurb.?	II BCE I BCE I	2/I BCE
MACEDONIA Stobi	5	^{1–2} house ³ synag.i ⁴ synag.ii ⁵ Xn.basilica	I–II III III–IV IV–V	3/III
ITALY Ostia	4	¹ insula? ² synag.i ³ synag.ii ^{3b} aedicula ⁴ synag.iib	I II–III III–IV IV IV–V	2/III
* All dates are CE unless otherwise indicated.				

Figure 27.5 An archaeological survey of the building history of Diaspora synagogues.
From White 1996–7: II, 30.

midst of a block of houses (Figure 27.6) into a formal synagogue edifice in three distinct phases (Figure 27.7) (White 1996–7: II, no. 60).

Second, over time, each building achieved more monumental scale and formal liturgical articulation. In particular, four of the six were outfitted with Torah shrines that stood as the focus of the assembly and worship arena (Figure 27.4). As an

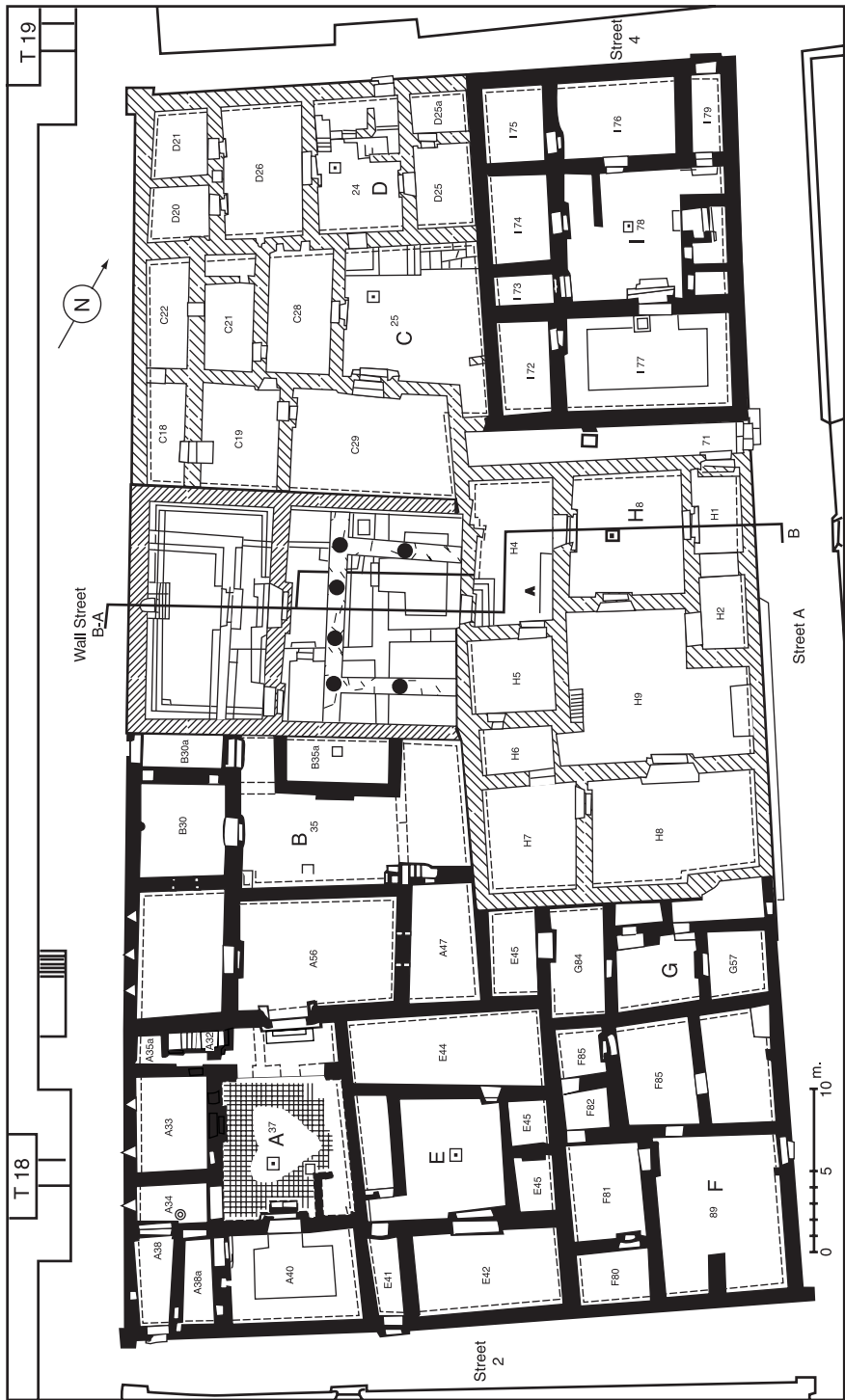


Figure 27.6 Plan of the block containing the synagogue in Dura-Europos. From White (1996–7: II, fig. 28).

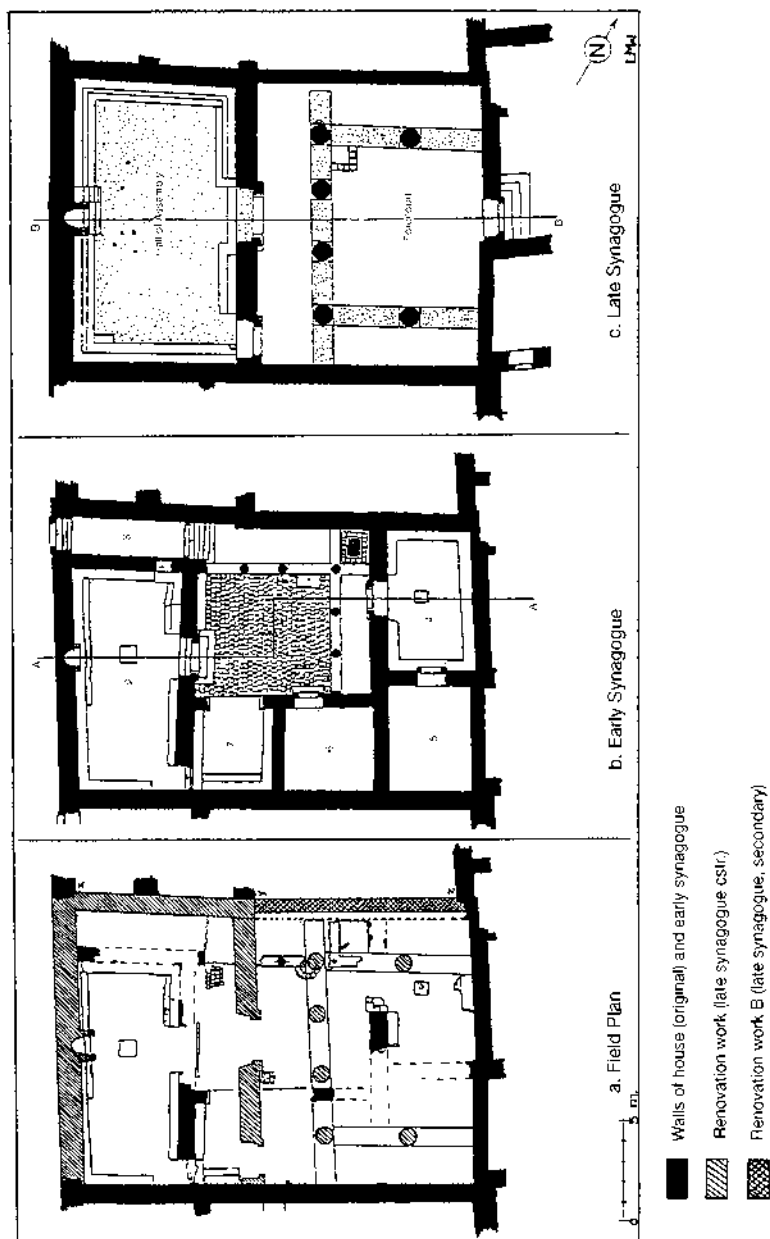


Figure 27.7 Plan of earlier and later phases of the synagogue in Dura-Europos. From White (1996–7: II, fig. 29).

architectural edifice, the Torah shrine does not appear before the late second century CE, and becomes more prominent in the third and fourth centuries. It marks an articulation of sacred space in the synagogue and is closely associated with the evolution and formalization of liturgy. Its development resulted from new religious functions and symbolism of the synagogue as sacred architecture that emerged after the destruction of the temple, correlated with the consolidation of the synagogue as a religious institution in the rabbinic tradition (White 1996–7: I, 93–101; Rutgers 1995; Fine 1996). Despite the absence of a fixed architectural form for the external building, by the end of this process one finds broad or elongated halls with the Torah shrine as focal point becoming the norm for internal plan. In their final stages, the synagogues at Ostia and Sardis, both of which lasted beyond the fifth century CE, reflect the influence of basilical architecture, probably from contemporaneous Christian usage. So the emergence of the Christian basilica from the fourth century onward influenced later synagogue architecture in the Homeland as well as the Diaspora (Foerster 1995: 92–4).

Third, most of the Diaspora synagogues made provision for social functions, especially dining, during some or all of their renovations. In earlier stages, it appears that dining might be more closely associated with the areas of assembly, while in later stages more segregation occurred. For example, in the Ostia synagogue (Figure 27.8) benches seem to be operative in two distinct areas from its first phases of renovation as a synagogue, while in its later phase, a separate dining hall seems to be annexed to the building (White 1996–7: II, no. 83; 1997). But this pattern varies significantly from building to building and group to group (Kraabel 1981; White 1998). Thus it may be argued that the process of growth and adaptation was an organic social function and only gradually took on more discrete liturgical planning.

Since the earliest Christian communities arose out of this Jewish matrix, it is not surprising to discover that they began with household meetings. Only gradually over time did they begin to adapt existing structures for their religious usage. Thus, two steps, the house-church and the *domus ecclesiae*, mark the beginnings of Christian architectural development.

The house-church

Writing near the end of the first century CE, the author of Luke-Acts noted that the earliest Christians, in addition to attending the temple, assembled to break bread 'from house to house' or 'at home' (*kat' oikon*) (Acts 2:46; 5:42; White 1996–7: I, 188, n.7). Acts also characterizes the ministry of Paul as typically holding meetings in domestic quarters (Acts 20:7), and it was common for whole households to be baptized following the conversion of the *pater* or *mater familias* (Acts 16:15, 34; 18:8). These household heads were also Paul's sponsors and hosts in the cities of the Roman East (Acts 18:3, 7, 24). While the account of Acts is likely idealized and intended for a theological and apologetic purpose (White 1995a: 256–61; 1995b: 36–8; Balch 1995: 232–3; cf. Esler 1987: 207–19), the basic picture of the house-church is substantiated by Paul's own letters, the earliest writings in the New Testament.

Paul's letters regularly relayed greetings both to and from 'so-and-so and the church in his/her/your/their house' (so 1 Cor. 16:19: Aquila and Prisca *syn tē kat'*

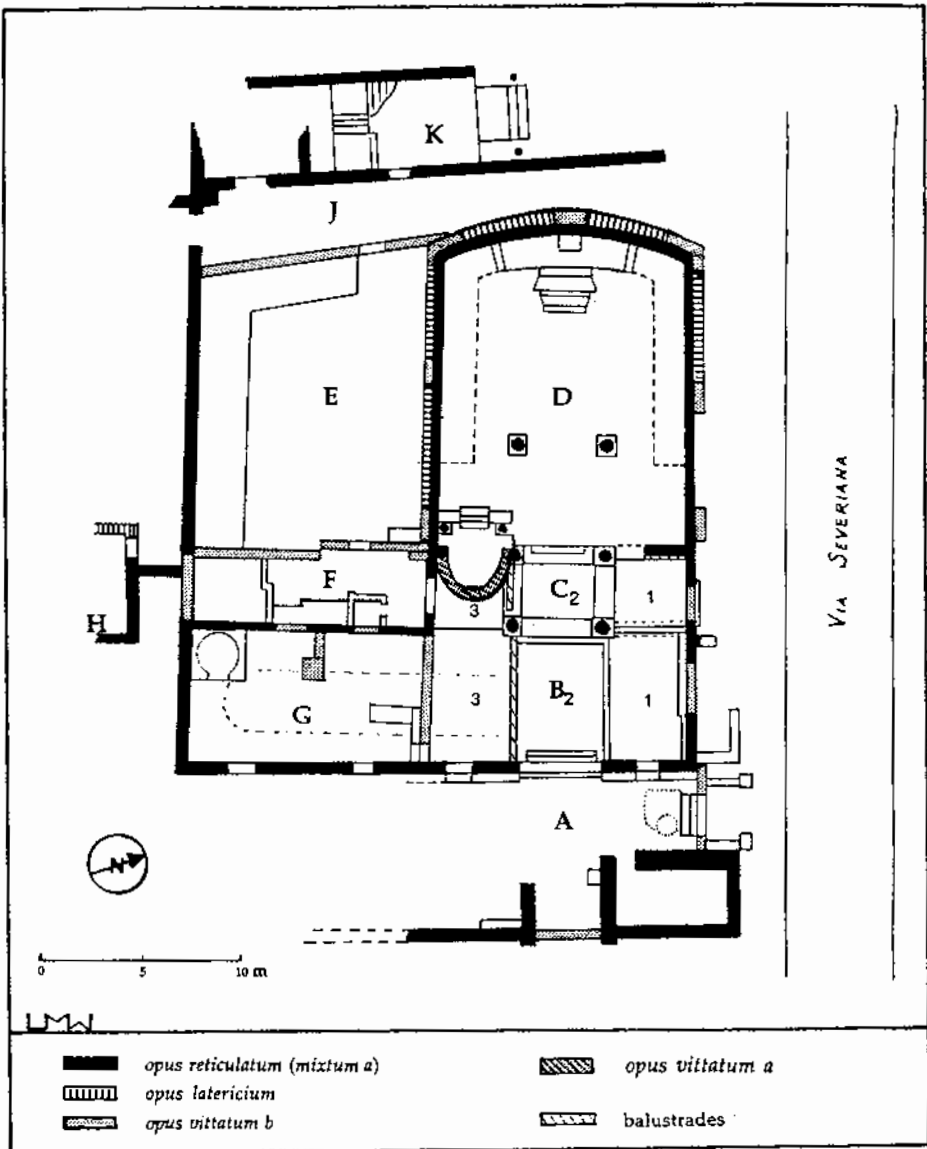


Figure 27.8 Composite plan of the synagogue at Ostia. From White (1997: fig. 3).

oikon autôn ekklēsia; cf. Rom. 16:5; Philem. 2; Col. 4:15). Other references confirm the fact that key households served as the nucleus of congregations (1 Cor. 1:11, 16; 16:15). From these descriptions has come the terminology of the ‘house-church’ as the designation for this early stage of development and organization at the time of the Pauline mission.¹¹ Some of the larger cities were made up of several house-churches. In Paul’s day Corinth had six or more house-church groups (Acts 18:3, 7;

1 Cor. 1:11, 16; 16:15; Rom. 16:2, 23) while Rome had at least eight (Rom. 16:5–16).

The owner of the house served as patron of the community as well as host to Paul and his co-workers (Rom. 16: 2, 23; Philem 22). As a result of this social and economic dependency conventions of patronage, hospitality and friendship – the social interstices of public and private – were important virtues in the social organization of these congregations and explain much about the character of Paul's relationship with them (Marshall 1987: 133–50; Osiek and Balch 1997: 193–212; Malherbe 1983: 92–103; White 1990b: 210–15; Fitzgerald 1996b; Mitchell 1997). Women such as Phoebe (Rom. 16:2), Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11), Prisca (1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3), Mary and Junia (Rom. 16: 6–7), and Nympha (Col. 4:15) are named as house-church patrons or leaders of household groups. It seems, therefore, that the house-church context afforded social standing and religious leadership roles to prominent women, much as it did in pagan cults and Jewish synagogues (Schüssler Fiorenza 1983: 162–8; Torjesen 1995: 53–110; Osiek and Balch 1997: 103–55).

Several characteristic features of Pauline worship and assembly can also be gleaned from these texts. First, the typical setting for worship was in the context of the communal meal, presumably in the dining room of the host's house. This is the setting presupposed for both the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 11: 17–34 and for the worship in 1 Cor. 14. At this stage, there was no formal distinction between the communal meal and the Eucharistic observance (White 1998: 178–80). Second, there seems to be no direct basis for seeing 'privacy' or cost as constraining factors for choosing the house setting, since dining and collegial activities were commonly held in domestic settings (contra Blue 1994: 121; cf. Krauthimer 1979: 24–5). Instead, already in Paul's day the house-church setting presupposed that at least some members of the community were of higher social and economic standing and used these means to host the church and its assembly (Meeks 1983: 51–73; Osiek and Balch 1997: 96–102; White 1996–7: II, 142–8).

Third, there was no peculiar synagogue organization that had become normative by this stage or that was taken by Paul when he was 'kicked out'. This notion is based on the polemic of Acts and imposes later Jewish norms than were actually operative in the mid-first century. The synagogues of the Diaspora were still in an early stage of development; hence, they were very diverse, and, as already noted, often used domestic contexts where the social organization closely resembled that of the surrounding Graeco-Roman culture (contra Burtchaell 1992: 228–63 and others; cf. Ascough 1998: 22–3). Hence unidirectional models of influence do not tell the whole story. While similarities certainly exist, they likely stem from the common social context and the reliance on patronage rather than on strict organizational or architectural norms. As long as the temple was standing, local Jewish congregations of all types, including Jewish-Christian groups at Antioch and Paul's predominantly gentile house-churches in the Aegean, followed local patterns of household and collegial assembly and organization.

Finally, and most importantly, the house-church, by definition, implies no special architectural articulation beyond that typical of houses, apartments, and other unrenovated spaces. This leaves us with an archaeological problem, however, since the lack of adaptation and spatial articulation means that the Christian places of

meeting are physically impossible to distinguish from other architecture. We are left only with literary remains that must be handled with caution.

According to the literary sources, houses were not the only places of meeting for the earliest Christians. Others include collegial or school halls, such as the 'hall' (*scholê*) of Tyrannus at Ephesus (Acts 19:9) and warehouses (*horrea*) at Rome (*Passio Pauli* 1; cf. White 1996–7: II, no. 9b). Even so, houses are by far the most prominent throughout the early literature. Even in the middle of the second century it appears that Justin Martyr was still meeting with other Christians in some sort of domestic complex or an apartment building, 'above the baths of so-and-so' (*Passio Sancti Iustini et socii* 3; White 1996–7: II, 7b). Even the worship and organization presupposed in early to mid-second century sources (e.g., *Didache* 12–14 and Justin's *Apology* I, 61–7, do not reflect more formal places of assembly; apparently there was no special place for baptism (White 1996–7: I, 110).

In later centuries it became common to associate formal church buildings with putative claims that there had originally been a house-church in the same location. This tendency shows the influence of the earlier house-church and *domus ecclesiae* in the evolving tradition, even though many of these later legends were spurious (cf. White 1996–7: II, nos. 42 and 50). In the case of the so-called *tituli* or house-churches of Rome, such as San Clemente, Christian usage of a house or private property in the early stages has proved difficult to maintain on archaeological grounds (White 1996–7: II, 1–10, no. 58, and appendix A; Snyder 1985: 67–81).

Because the house-church was not archaeologically distinguishable, our first glimpses of the architectural development must come from the first attempts at spatial adaptation. There is, thus, a kind of transitional phase when houses and other buildings began to be partially altered by Christians for specific religious purposes based most likely on continued patterns of usage.¹² Over time certain areas might be given over to virtually exclusive Christian usage or decorated with Christian symbols. Once physical adaptation of the space and the edifice commenced, then the architecture was moving beyond the house-church both in physical terms and in the minds of the users.

By the early second century we begin to see some shifts in the way that some Christians thought about their assembly space in terms of its religious and communal significance. For example, in the Johannine epistles (2–3 John), which likely come from Asia Minor, the setting still clearly presupposed a localized house-church under a patron (Malherbe 1983: 103–9). The local patron, Diotrophes, had refused to welcome some travelling Christians with letters of recommendation into his assembly and even expelled some of his own congregation who wished to admit them (3 John 9–10). Thus, tensions erupted between several different house-church cells, and the role of local patrons was significant.

Perhaps even more telling is the other letter (2 John) by the same Christian 'elder' who opposed Diotrophes, since his directives for dealing with travelling Christians closely parallel the actions taken by Diotrophes. It says, 'if anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine (*didachên*) do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting (*mê lambanete auton eis oikian kai chairein autô mê legete*); for the one who gives him greeting shares (*koinônei*) in his evil works' (2 John 10). The formal greeting was a sign of hospitality and fellowship; it was not offered lightly.

The visitor, therefore, was stopped at the door of the house and either welcomed or refused admission, in this case based on an anti-docetic creedal affirmation (2 John 7). The procedure makes it clear that admission to the house, and hence to the church's assembly space, had become an important symbol of fellowship. The door of the house and the ritualized greeting enacted there had begun to function both spatially and symbolically as boundary markers of the church. In effect, they had moved one step closer to identifying the space where the church met with the 'church' as some idealized entity.

This shift in conceptualization is very important to the later development of both ecclesiology and church architecture. It must be remembered that the term 'church' (*ekklêsia*) originally just meant the assembled group or congregation. In the Septuagint it was used to translate the symbolically loaded phrase 'congregation of Israel' (Deut. 23:1–3, 8; 31:30; 1 Kgs 8:14, 22, 55, 65; Neh. 8:2, 14; Sir. 15:5; 1 Macc. 4:59; 5:16; 14:19) and was synonymous with synagogue (*sunagôgê*; Exod. 16:9–10; 35:1; Deut. 5:22; 1 Kgs 12:20–21; Sir. 1:30; 1 Macc. 14:28). The two terms could also be used in combination as subject and verb (so 1 Kgs 12:21: *exekklêsiasen tēn sunagôgēn*) not unlike the phrasing typically found in Paul's letters (so 1 Cor. 11:18: *sunerchomenôn humôn en ekklêsia*, cf. 11:20; 14:23; and 1 Cor. 5:4 which explicitly uses the verb *sunagôgein*).

Only in the period well after the destruction of the temple do these terms become clearly differentiated along sectarian lines. Within the Jewish-Christian matrix of Matthew's gospel, the terms were used to distinguish two distinct congregations in social conflict – '[our] church' (Matt. 18:15–20) and 'their/your synagogue' (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 10:17; 12:9; 13:54; 23:34). Symbolization of the assembled congregation reinforced boundary definition of the group. It was analogous to that in the Johannine epistles, albeit on quite different grounds (cf. White 1991: 215–16 and n. 17). Growing tensions and boundary definition would result in the separation of the Christian movement from Judaism, at least in most regions, and thereupon the stage was set for a new kind of ideology of religious assembly to develop for both Jews and Christians (White 1998: 195–7). None the less, local influences would still be determinative for each.

The *domus ecclesiae* and architectural adaptation

As Christianity became more firmly rooted in the urban social context of the Roman world, it followed patterns of architectural adaptation and rebuilding. The cities themselves were constantly under construction, especially from Trajan to the Severans. Churches, like all sorts of other edifices, were built and rebuilt, remodelled and transformed with the urban growth of cities (see Figure 27.9). The progression towards a distinctive Christian architecture moved gradually to renovation of existing buildings in order to transform them into places set aside for assembly and other liturgical and social functions. To distinguish this phase from the house-church we use the term *domus ecclesiae* ('house of the church') based on terminology found in Eusebius (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 7.30.19) and others (Rordorf 1964: 117; Krautheimer 1979: 27; White 1996–7: I, 111, II, 25–6; Finney 1988: 325, 331–5).

The clearest example of this shift can be seen in the Christian building discovered

<i>Site</i>	<i>No. of phases</i>	<i>Building type</i>	<i>Dates (CE)</i>	<i>First Xn. phase date</i>
SYRIA (including Arabia)				
Dura-Europos	2	¹⁻² house/church	231–56	2/c. 240
Qirqbize	5	¹⁻² house/hall ³⁻⁵ basilica	330–VI	1/c. 330
Umm el-Jimal	3	¹⁻² house, ³ basilica	IV–VI	2?–3/IV
PALESTINE				
Capernaum	3	¹ house, ² hall ³ octagonal church	IV–VI	2/IV
MACEDONIA				
Philippi	3	¹ Heröon, ² hall church, ³ octagon	IV–VI	2/c. 334
ISTRIA				
Parentium	5	¹⁻² Roman edifice, ³ hall, ⁴ bas., ⁵ cathedr.	III–V	3/IV
Aquieieia	4	¹ house, ² commerc. bldg. ³ hall cmplx., ⁴⁻⁵ basilica	III–VI	3/IV
ITALY				
Rome				
Ss Giovanni e Paolo	6	¹⁻³ insula, ⁴ hall, ⁵⁻⁶ basilica	II–V	3/III
S. Clemente	5	¹⁻² Mag./domus ³ hall?, ⁴⁻⁵ basilica	I/III–V	3/III
S. Martino al Monti	4	¹⁻² commerc.bldg. ³⁻⁴ hall/bas.	III–VI	4/IV
S. Crisogono	4	¹⁻² hall ³⁻⁴ basilica	IV–VI	1/c. 310
BRITAIN				
Lullingstone	5	¹⁻⁴ villa/chapel	IV–V	4/c. 350

Figure 27.9 Prebasilical church buildings: an archaeological survey of adaptation and renovation. From White (1996–7: II, 27).

at Dura-Europos in 1931 (Figure 27.10). It was a typical Durene house that had been adapted through a single phase of internal renovations to serve as a place of Christian assembly. In other words, through the process of renovation and adaptation it had become a building set aside for Christian religious functions. The nature of the renovations indicate that ordinary domestic functions ceased after the renovations; it had become a ‘church building’. The house had been built about 231 CE

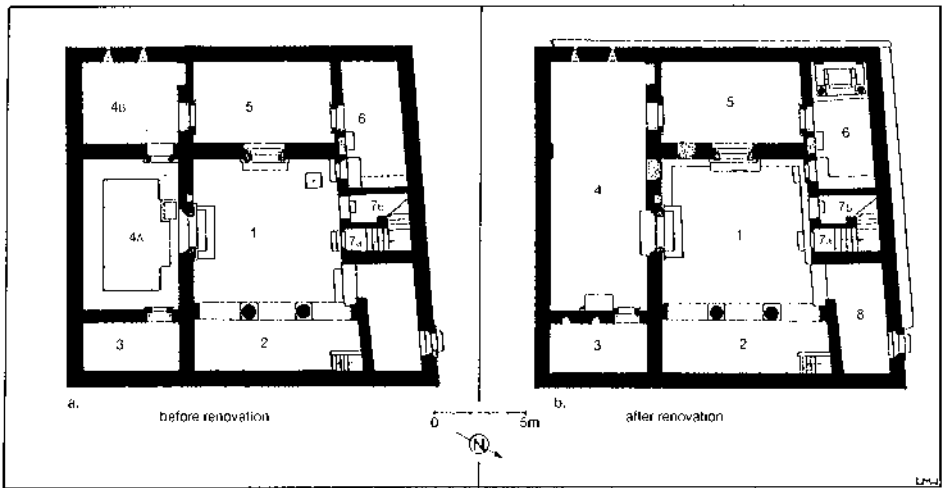


Figure 27.10 The Christian building at Dura-Europos, before and after renovation. From White (1996–7: II, Fig. 2).

and renovated as a *domus ecclesiae* in c. 240/1 (White 1996–7: I, 120–2; II, 18–24 and no. 36; Kraeling 1967). Because the city was destroyed in 256 CE during Sassanian incursions, it provides a rare case in early Christian architecture where there is clear evidence of an early stage of adaptation without later phases of rebuilding. It is also significant that along the same street were found two other houses that had been remodelled by religious groups – one a mithraeum that went through three phases of adaptation; the other, a synagogue that went through two. In both cases donor inscriptions commemorated the renovation work (White 1996–7: II, 10–18; II, nos. 58–61). The last phases of renovation in the mithraeum and the synagogue were contemporaneous with the single phase of renovation in the *domus ecclesiae*.

Among private dwellings at Dura, the house was fairly large but otherwise typical with several rooms grouped around a central courtyard. On the exterior the house was almost untouched and retained its domestic appearance. On the interior, the main structural modifications occurred in three areas: (a) the courtyard, (b) the south suite (rooms 3, 4A, and 4B), and (c) the west suite (rooms 5 and 6). Renovation of the courtyard was minimal; it included raising and paving the floor and installing two banks of L-shaped benches, and various finishing touches.

In the south suite a formal door led from the court into room 4A, originally the dining room of the house. With plaster benches and a brazier box, the dining room was typical of the Durene domestic *diwan*. Room 3 was most likely a pantry, while room 4B was connected to other living areas of the house. In the remodelling of the edifice, the partition wall between rooms 4A and 4B was removed. The floor was then filled in to the height of the benches to create one large room for assembly, with a dais installed at its east end. Room 3 continued to serve as a storage or preparation area. Other than plastering of the walls and memorial graffiti there was little or no decoration in this area; a low shuttered window was cut through to the courtyard.

On the west side of the courtyard another formal doorway led to room 5.

Originally, rooms 5 and/or 6 might have served as the women's quarters. Only minimal changes were made in room 5; another shuttered window to the courtyard was introduced, and the door from room 5 to room 6 was fitted with more elaborate trim. Such formal trimwork is unusual for an interior doorway and suggests that this door had become part of a new pattern of movement through the edifice.

Room 6 had originally been only a modest chamber, but in the Christian renovations received the most extensive makeover of all. It was converted into a formal baptistery. A font basin nearly 1 metre in depth was set into the floor on the west end of the room. Above it was a decorated canopy carried by pilasters and two plaster columns painted to look like marble. Above the canopy a new ceiling/floor structure divided the space vertically to create an upstairs apartment. On the south wall a small niche between the two doors was enlarged and arcuated, and low steps or benches were set along the east and west ends of the room. Then the entire room was decorated with an extensive pictorial programme containing some of the earliest datable examples of Christian biblical illustrations.

Along the east and north walls of room 6 there were two registers that appear to wrap around the corner. The lower contained a scene of five women approaching the tomb (a sarcophagus) of Jesus. The composition suggests a processional towards the font, so that movement of initiates paralleled the scene from the gospels. All that is preserved of the upper register are two scenes depicting Jesus' miracles, both of which were associated with water. The lunette above the font contained a good shepherd scene and a small vignette of Adam and Eve. Immediately to its south side was a scene of the Samaritan woman at the well (more water symbolism from John 4), and between the windows was a scene of David slaying Goliath. In the borders of this scene two Christian graffiti were incised, and a similar text appeared in room 4 (White 1996–7: II, no. 37). The individuals commemorated by these graffiti might have been martyrs or, more likely, Christian leaders or those who assisted in the renovation of the building.

Taken together, the renovations indicate a conscious plan to adapt the building for particular patterns of religious usage. One area was for assembly and worship, presumably including a Eucharistic liturgy and teaching. The courtyard might also have been used for assembly and fellowship functions, but there is no direct evidence of communal dining. Rooms 5 and 6 seem to have been set aside for other specialized functions, especially baptism. It affords the earliest surviving evidence of a formally designed baptistery set within an actual Christian building. Nothing can be ascertained regarding the usage of the upper floor rooms.

The Dura-Europos Christian building thus marks a full transition to a specialized church edifice, a *domus ecclesiae*. While it is possible that this house was already in use by Christians before the renovation there is no direct evidence. It is likely, however, that most local Christian congregations made a more gradual transition by partial adaptation. It is also likely that these stages of adaptation varied significantly from place to place. One might guess that the Dura-Europos building, located in a relatively remote garrison town on the Eastern frontier, was not the first to devise such modes of spatial usage or artistic decoration, even though their appropriation was local and idiosyncratic.

The only other direct evidence of partial adaption of a house for Christian

assembly comes from the Lullingstone Roman villa (Figure 27.11) near London (White 1996–7: I, 125; II, no. 57). In one wing of the house, away from the formal dining area and an adjacent bath complex, a moderately sized room (locus C) and antechamber were decorated with Christian symbols. It appears that this wing also had a separate entrance allowing for Christian gatherings that did not interfere with continuing domestic functions in the remainder of the house. Like Dura, this case is remarkable for its date, since the installation of the Christian chapel occurred in the second half of the fourth century, well after basilical church buildings were being built at Rome and elsewhere. Hence, the phases suggested here are not meant to suggest strict chronological limits but rather developmental stages. The progression might vary widely from place to place. Nor is it the case that every church building will have gone through all these stages.

Other instances of partial renovation are indicated in two of the titular churches of Rome, San Clemente and San Giovanni e Paolo. (See White 1996–7: I, 114–5; II, nos. 52–3; see also this volume pp. 720–2, 730.) In both cases there is archaeological evidence of Christian usage by the third century; both were renovated to create large assembly halls before being thoroughly rebuilt in basilical form in the early fifth century. In the case of San Clemente, there is no clear evidence of a *domus ecclesiae* phase in between the earlier Roman warehouse building and the Christian hall of the third-fourth centuries. Since tradition holds that there were congregations associated with both at earlier times, it has been assumed that some sort of spatial provisions had already been made; however, direct archaeological evidence is lacking (Krautheimer 1979: 29–30; White 1996–7: II, 1–6; Snyder 1985: 76).¹³

At least some literary texts suggest that such changes were already at work by the beginning of the third century in some of the more populous regions. Clement of Alexandria, writing near the turn of the third century, preferred to call ‘not the place, but the assembly of the elect, the church’ (*Stromateis* 7.5; White 1996–7: II, no. 12a). Indeed, his emphatic tone suggests that the terminology had already begun to blur. Even Clement himself on another occasion refers to ‘going to church’ in such a way as to suggest both a regular time and *place* of assembly; in regard to dress and deportment he further draws distinctions between *inside* and *outside* the church assembly (*Paedagogus* 3.11; White 1996–7: II, no. 12b).

Moreover, Clement seems to reflect a worship context where the Eucharist and the *agape* or fellowship meal had already become fully separated (*Paedagogus* 2.1). Writing at the same time in North Africa, Tertullian shows no clear distinction (*Apology* 39; White 1996–7: II, no. 13a); however, within two decades at Rome the liturgical tradition of Hippolytus makes the separation explicit and further regulates the convening of private Christian dinners (*Apostolic Tradition* 21–6; White 1996–7: II, no. 14; White 1998: 181–5; cf. Bobertz 1993). It is likely that such localized patterns of liturgical development were reflected in the physical arrangements and adaptations. The spatial articulation of the Dura *domus ecclesiae* presupposed a separate and more formal Eucharistic assembly with no social dining. One must guess that this change marked a broader shift in the spatial articulation and layout for Christian assembly.

The Dura *domus ecclesiae* is also important because it suggests that the edifice had become the property of the church and was publicly identifiable even though it

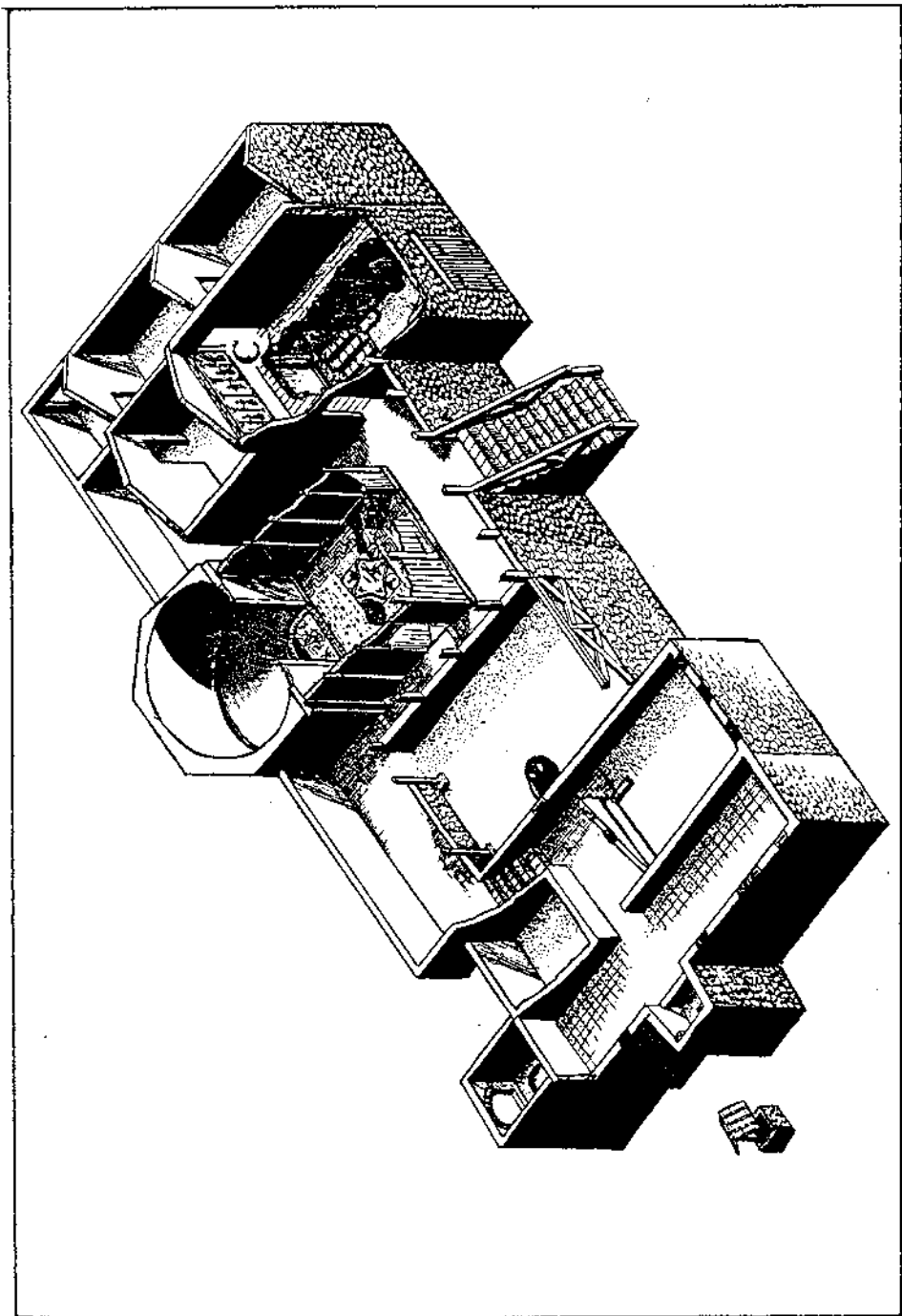


Figure 27.1.1 Isometric drawing of the late Roman villa, with Christian chapel (c. 390), at Lullingstone. From White (1996–7: II, fig. 23).

had not yet become a distinctive church architecture. Other literary and documentary sources provide important historical indicators to support this shift. The *Edessene Chronicle*, a fifth-century Syriac court record, reports 'a temple (or sanctuary) of the church of the Christians' that was destroyed along with other buildings by a flood in the year 201 CE (§ 8; White 1996–7: II, no. 26). Later the *Chronicle* (§ 12) mentions a new church foundation in the year 313 by the bishop Kûnê. Given the nature of these references, it does not suggest a more formal type of architecture in the year 201, but rather the wording of a door plaque from an earlier type of *domus ecclesiae* (White 1996–7: I, 118).

The *aula ecclesiae*

By the end of the third century church buildings were clearly recognized by local civic officials in many cities. Such can be seen from villages in Egypt, where census and court records openly mention Christian 'church buildings' (*P. Oxy.* I, 43; VI.903; *P. Gen. Inv.* 108) as well as property transfers and ownership by the church (*P. Oxy.* XII.1492; *P. Gen. Inv.* 108; White 1996–7: II, nos. 43–5, 47). In two other cases there are court records of the search and seizure of church property during the Diocletianic persecution. From Egypt the reader of a village church near Oxyrhynchus filed a property declaration after their church building was seized in 304 (*P. Oxy.* XXXIII.2673; White 1996–7: II, no. 46). From the previous year a court record from Cirta in Numidia records the search of the local church building and describes its dining hall (*triclinium*), a library, and a large cache of clothing, apparently for charitable distribution; however, no description is given of the assembly room proper (*Acta Munati Felicis* from the *Gestae apud Zenophilum*; White 1996–7: II, no. 31). One might well guess that the edifice was still in the form of a *domus ecclesiae*, but certainty is impossible. Clearly the church edifice at Nicomedia, whose destruction Diocletian is reported to have witnessed from his palace, was a publicly recognized edifice even though it was not a monumental church building (Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum* 12; White 1996–7: II, no. 24).

These records suggest that in between the renovation of existing structures to form a *domus ecclesiae* and the building of monumental basilicas after the peace of Constantine there was an intermediate stage of development in which further enlargement and specialized adaptations were introduced. Although local variations must be allowed, this stage occurred generally in the second half of the third century CE. It continued in some localities, including Rome itself, through the fourth century. This type of development is what Eusebius describes regarding the rebuilding of older church buildings in the period of growth before the Great Persecution. He says:

With what favour one may observe the rulers in every church being honoured by all procurators and governors. Or how could anyone describe those assemblies with numberless crowds and the great throngs gathered together in every city as well as the remarkable concourses in the houses of prayer? On account of these things, no longer being satisfied with their old buildings (*tois palai oikodomêmasin*), they erected from the foundations churches of spacious

dimensions in every city (*eis platos ana pasas tas poleis ek themeliôn anistôn ekklēsias*).

(*Historia Ecclesiastica* 8.1.5; White 1996–7: II, no. 23b)

Eusebius' comments ring with some realistic elements, including rebuilding and enlarging the old structures 'from the foundations'.¹⁴ Because many of these new buildings include larger hall-shaped structures in their building plans, we may designate this phase the *aula ecclesiae* (or 'hall of the church'); still, it does not imply the architectural elements or the scale that would be introduced with the basilica.

Eusebius' comments were doubtless hyperbole, since he interpreted this period of popular growth as a cause of the ensuing persecutions (*H.E.* 8.1.9–2.5). None the less, there is considerable evidence that it was a period of new growth and adaptation in church building. Unfortunately the literary sources rarely give physical and architectural descriptions of these buildings; however, a few passing references may provide some clues. For example Cyprian's letters from the middle of the third century occasionally mention accoutrements of assembly. In referring to the ordination of a reader, he spoke of placing him 'upon the pulpit (*pulpitum*), that is upon the tribunal of church', which was 'propped up in the place of highest elevation and conspicuous to the entire congregation' (*Epistle* 39.4.1; White 1996–7: II, no. 16.a). In other places it appears that the phrase 'to ascend the platform' (*ad pulpitum venire*) had become a technical term for ordination (cf. *Epp.* 38.2; 40).

So it seems that by the middle of the third century, in Carthage at least, the church building had been outfitted with a raised dais or platform (called *pulpitum* or *tribunal*) for some clerical and liturgical functions. While the general plan of Cyprian's church building cannot be ascertained, it suggests something of a larger rectangular hall with a dais on one end. In a letter to the bishop of Rome Cyprian referred to this space as 'the sacred and venerated *congestum* of the clergy' (*Ep.* 59.18.1; White 1996–7: II, no. 16.d). Such a construction may have been the forerunner of the chancel as a segregated area for clergy.

This picture is supported in other large urban centres of the empire during the latter half of the second century. At Antioch the ecclesiastical crisis precipitated by the episcopate of Paul of Samosata (261–70 CE) similarly provokes passing references to activities inside their church buildings. Among the charges levelled against Paul prior to his expulsion as a heretic was that he had installed a throne and a *secretum* on the *bema* in his church at Antioch (Eusebius, *H.E.* 7.30.9; White 1996–7: II, no. 20). The terminology used here explicitly comes from the arena of Roman civic architecture since the Greek text mentions the Latin *secretum* (*sêkrêton*), the private chamber of a Roman magistrate, while *bema* (*bêma*) is the usual Greek equivalent for the Latin *pulpitum*, the raised platform on which the magistrate sat. To Paul's outraged opponents, these elements of public architecture were less a threat in themselves than they were symptomatic of Paul's inordinate self-aggrandizement and his other faulty theological ideas. There is no indication that these installations were removed from the building when Paul was expelled. Thus, it appears that by the year 270 the church at Antioch had become a large hall of some sort with several accoutrements of public architecture. It had become an *aula ecclesiae*.

It is also noteworthy that other buildings from the same period lagged far behind

in size and architectural articulation. The simpler *domus ecclesiae* at Dura-Europos was roughly contemporaneous with the more elaborate buildings suggested for Carthage and Antioch. On the other hand, household meetings were still common during the Diocletianic persecution, and other church buildings still presupposed some elements of domestic architecture (White 1996–7: I.126; II, nos. 21, 36). Sources from this period indicate further elaborations in the ordering of assembly, at least in some areas. The Syriac *Didascalia*, for example, is the earliest church order text to prescribe a seating arrangement for various members of the congregation in a pattern that fits a rectangular hall plan, whether of larger or smaller dimensions (§ 12; White 1996–7: II, no. 18).

The archaeological evidence supports this picture of a gradual progression towards rectangular assembly halls. The clearest case of a pre-Constantinian church building, apparently planned *de novo* for Christian use, is that of San Crisogono in Rome's Trastevere region (Figures 27.12, 27.13b). It was apparently designed as a large rectangular hall of irregular proportions (length: 35.35 metres; width: 17.25–19.25 metres) with an exterior portico on one side but no interior divisions (White 1996–7: II, 55; Krautheimer 1979: 37–8; Snyder 1985: 81–2). It was built by about the year 310 and continued in this rudimentary form for over a century before it was remodelled. In the early sixth century its western wall was levelled, the hall was extended, and an apse added on to the new west end. On the east end, a crossing wall was introduced to divide the assembly hall (or nave) from a vestibule (or narthex), thereby giving it some features of basilical architecture. Even so, the edifice lacked the colonnaded aisles typical of true basilical architecture; only in the twelfth century was the church thoroughly rebuilt as a basilica on top of the original buildings (Figure 27.13a).

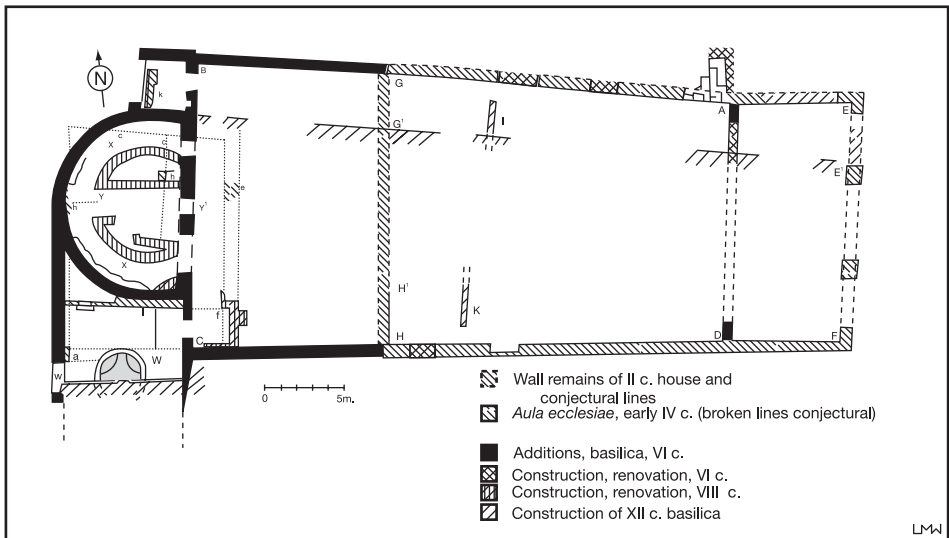


Figure 27.12 Plan of San Crisogono in Rome. From White (1996–7: II, fig. 19).

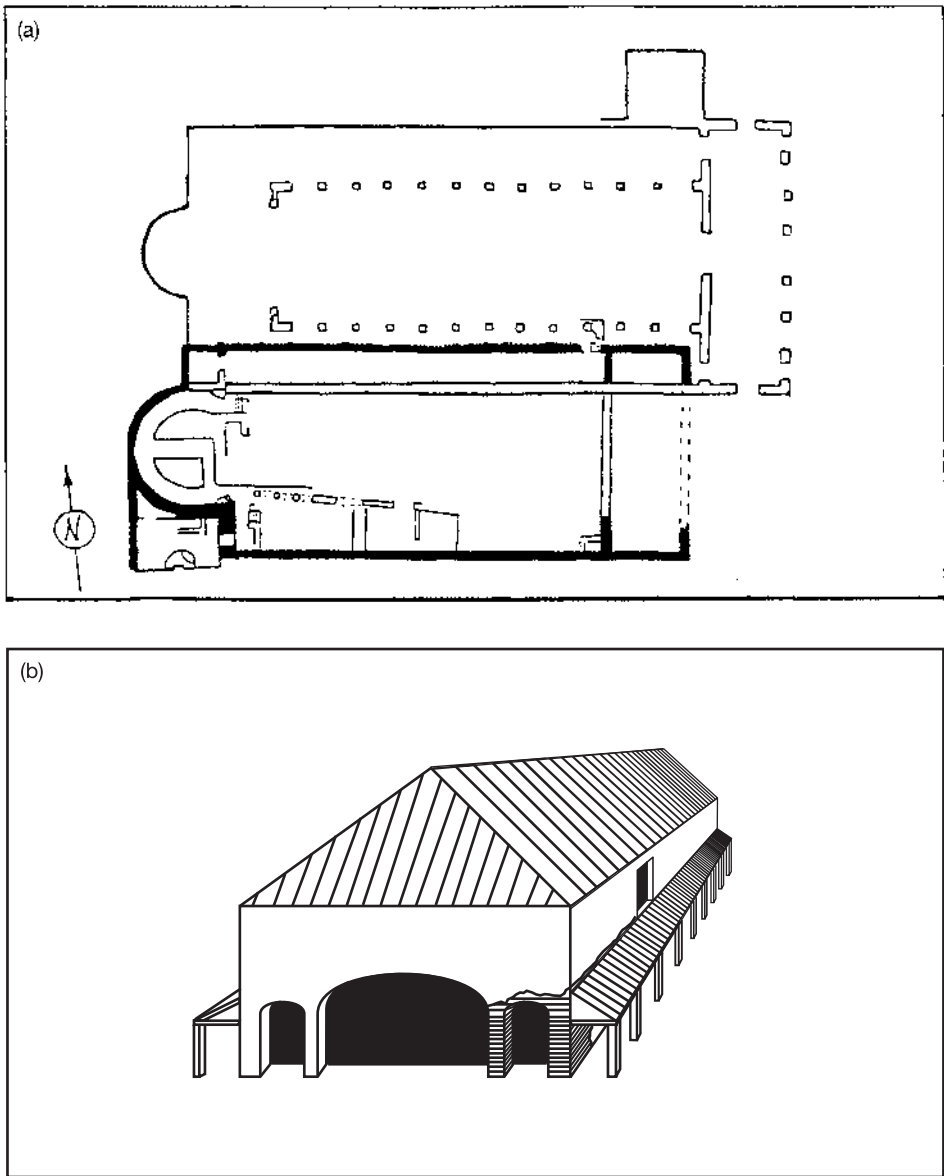


Figure 27.13 Siting plan (a) and restoration drawing (b), of early *aula ecclesiae*, San Crisogono, Rome From White (1996–7: II, fig. 20a–b).

Two of the Roman *tituli* (the traditional ‘parish’ churches) seem to reflect a stage of adaptation from existing buildings directly to the *aula ecclesiae*. One is San Clemente (Figure 27.14), where a plain hall edifice was constructed on the upper floor level of the late third century and survived to the beginning of the fifth century before the first basilica was built on this basic plan (White 1996–7: II, no. 53).

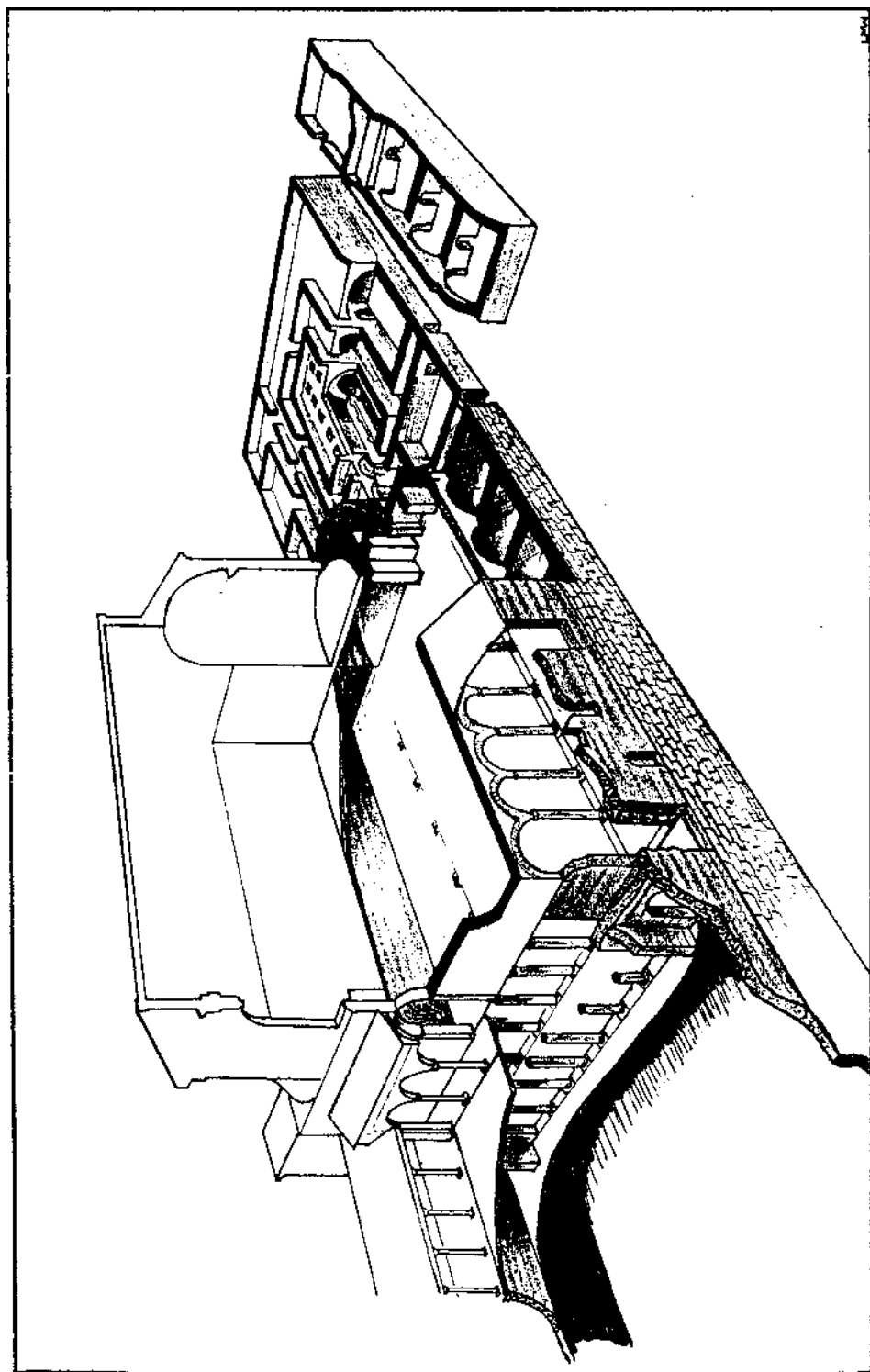


Figure 27.14 Isometric drawing of San Clemente, Rome. From White (1996-7: II, fig. 17).

The basilica of SS Giovanni e Paolo was built *c.* 410 CE over an earlier apartment building with ground-floor shops. The nave of the basilica was set at the level of the second storey of this apartment complex, where it appears that the rooms had already been renovated to form a large hall before the beginning of the fourth century (Figures 27.15, 27.16). The walls of this hall were later preserved in the construction of the basilica. It has been suggested that Christians might have earlier used one or more of the ground-floor shops before and after this initial renovation; however, the first indication of Christian usage appears to be the construction of the large hall of the upper storey (White 1996–7: II, no. 52; Krautheimer 1939–56: I, 4: 267–303; Snyder 1985: 78–80).

The prevalence of the *aula ecclesiae* is shown by the fact that throughout the fourth century new church construction continued in this form alongside the introduction of basilical architecture. Three cases are worth noting. First is the so-called ‘basilica of Paul’, a small hall edifice found beneath the fifth-century octagonal church D at Philippi (Figure 27.17, 27.18). The name comes from an inscription in its mosaic floor, which also identifies its bishop, Porphyrios; on this basis it can be dated roughly between 330–40 CE (White 1996–7: I, 134–6; II, no. 49). Despite the terminology of the inscription it was not a true basilica architecturally; however, this usage suggests that the term ‘basilica’ had already been applied to ‘church buildings’, apart from its more precise architectural signification (White 1996–7 I, 196 and n. 92 and Voelkl 1954).

Second is the simple hall from Qirqbize (near Aleppo in Roman Coelesyria), built in the first third of the fourth century. The nature of the construction shows that it was modelled in part after a domestic plan, with a porticoed courtyard flanking the

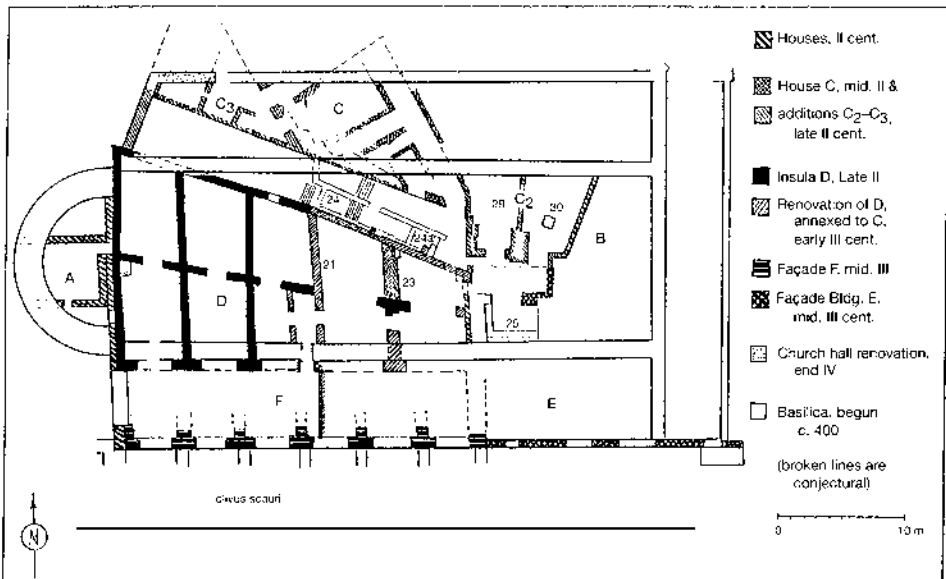


Figure 27.15 Plan of SS Giovanni e Paolo, Rome. From White (1996–7: II, fig. 14).

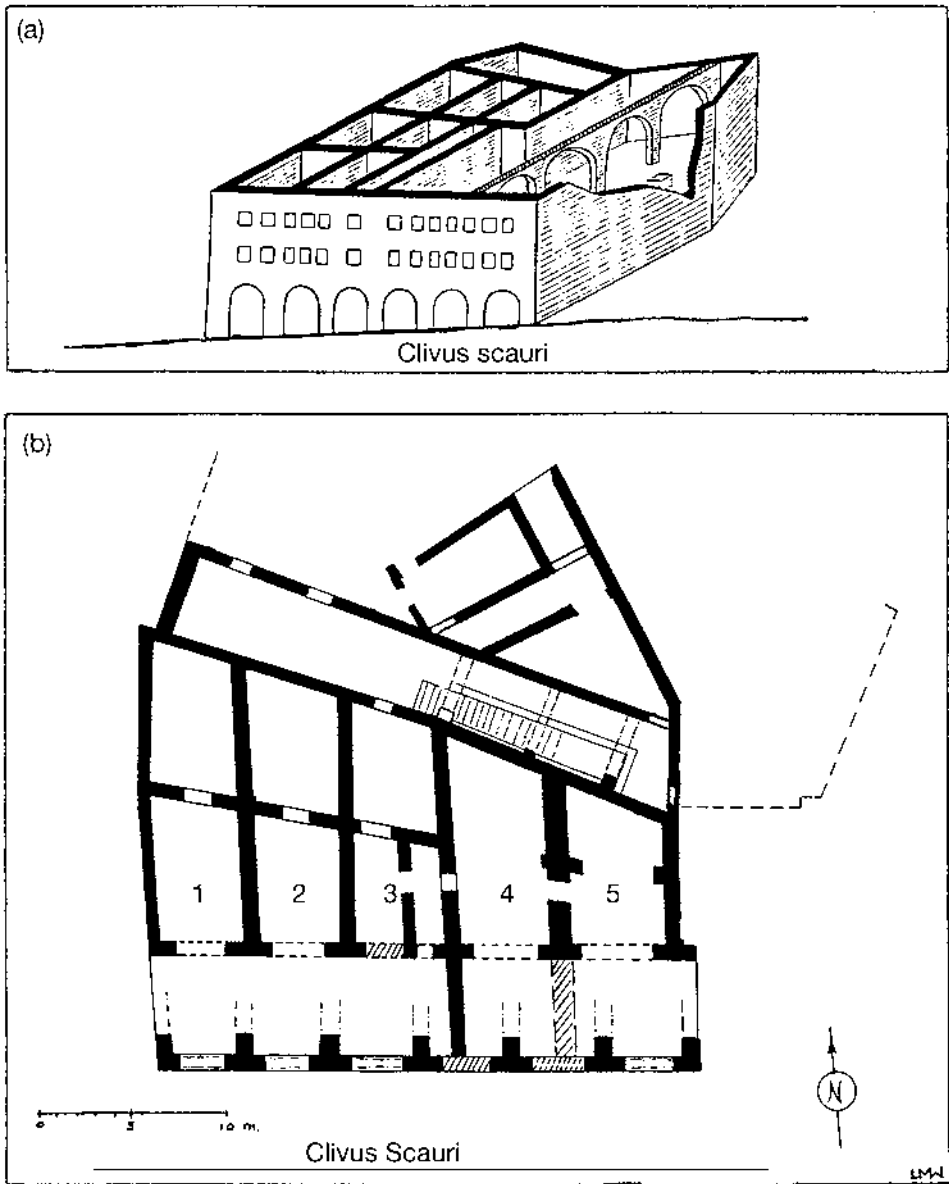


Figure 27.16. Isometric reconstruction (a) and plan (b) of SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Rome. From White (1996–7: II, fig.15).

hall proper; however, it was designed for Christian usage from the beginning. In its later stages, the hall was adapted to a basilical style on the interior, in keeping with typical Syrian church architecture of the fifth and sixth centuries. It likely served as a village church, and might have been built by the owner of the estate next door (White 1996–7: II, 38 with plans).

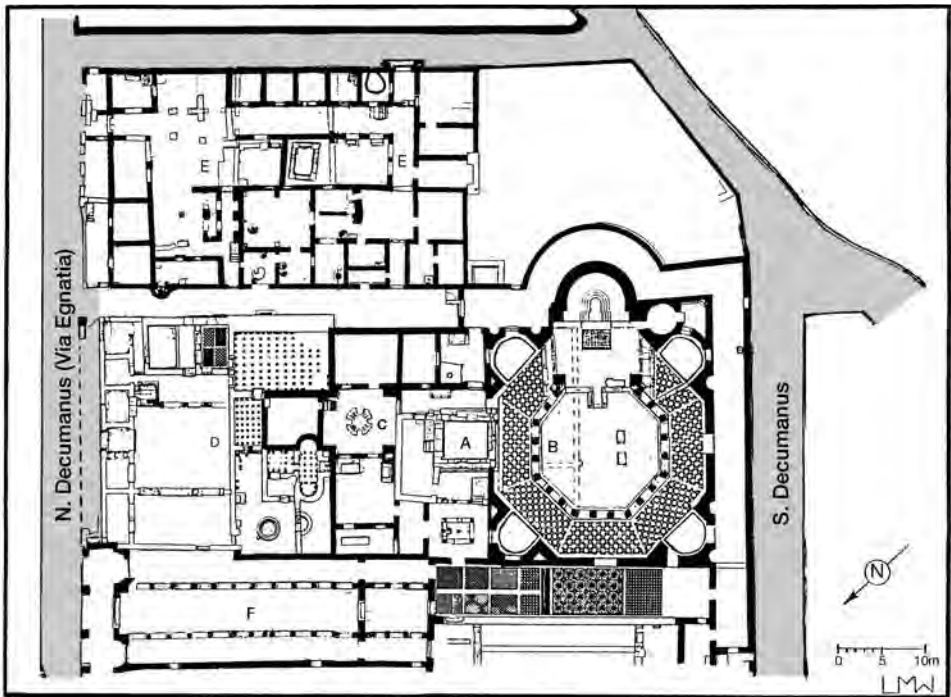


Figure 27.17 Plan of the octagonal church at Philippi. From White (1996–7: II, fig. 9).

Third is the early church edifice found beneath two later layers of basilical construction at Parentium, Istria (modern Parenzo or Poreč). The sixth-century complex is known as the basilica of Eufrasius. It stood over a fifth-century basilica with elaborate mosaic floors, which in turn stood over a fourth-century *aula ecclesiae* that also contained Christian mosaic floors. Legends associated with the fifth-century construction held that the earlier building had been the house of a martyr, bishop Maurus, and the earlier edifice was thought to be a *domus ecclesiae*. While some earlier domestic structures may be present, it appears that the first Christian construction belongs to the fourth-century building, a *de novo* Christian edifice with two small parallel halls and other associated rooms (White 1996–7: 122; 194 n. 73; II, no. 50, with plans).

THE BIRTH OF THE BASILICA: THE FOURTH AND FIFTH CENTURIES

The period immediately after the Edict of Milan (313 CE) saw a new burst of church building, which Eusebius contrasts to the ‘destruction of the churches’ during the persecutions (*H.E.* 10.3.1). His programmatic interests are none the less visible:

a divine joy blossomed in all as we beheld every place which, a short time

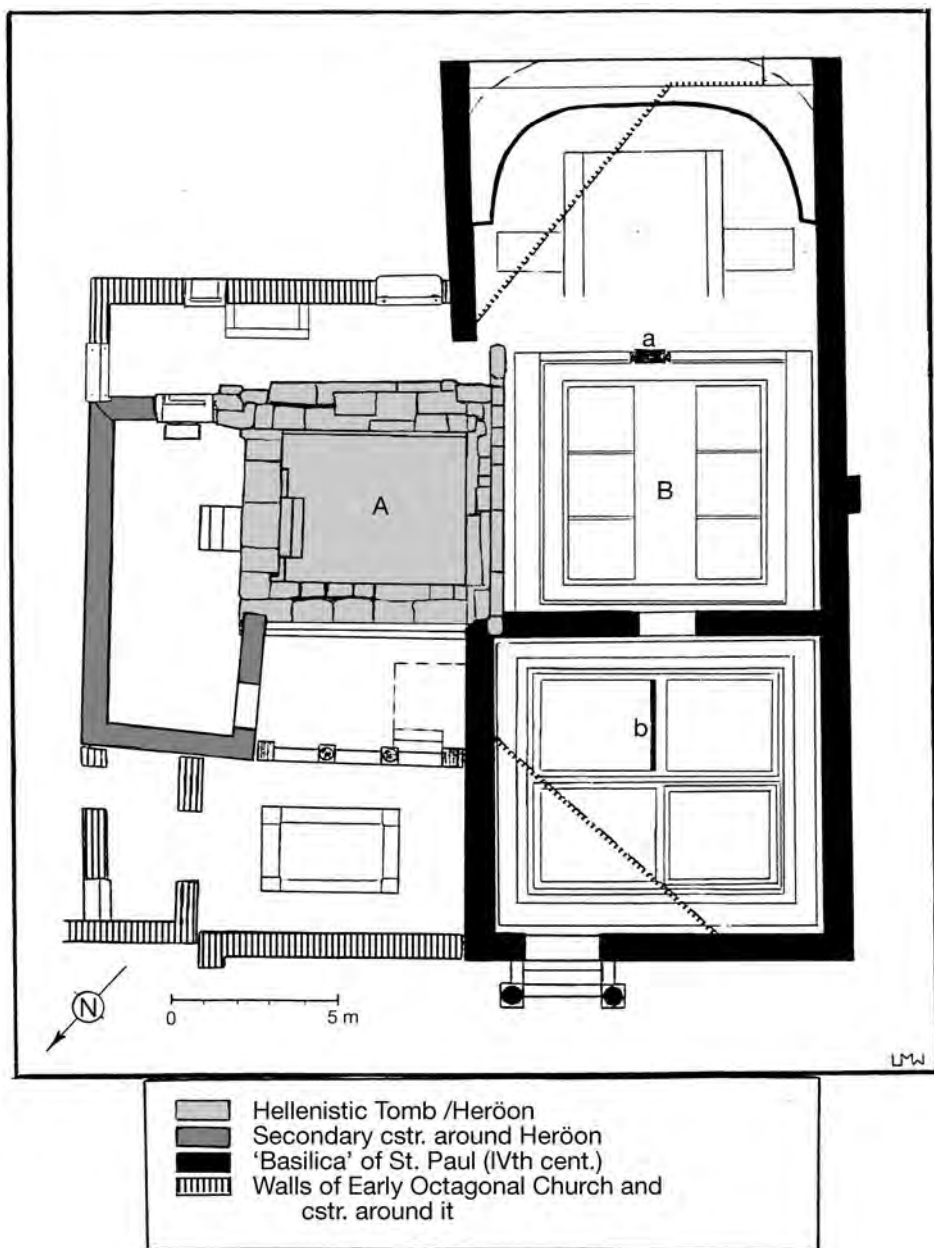


Figure 27.18 Plan of the 'basilica' of Paul at Philippi (White 1996–97: II, fig. 10).

before, had been torn down by the impious deeds of the tyrants. Reviving as from long and deadly mistreatment, the *temples* were raised once again from the foundation to a lofty height and received in far greater measure the magnificence of those that had formerly been destroyed.

(H.E. 10.2.1; emphasis added)

While some churches were doubtless destroyed, it was not uniform. Lactantius describes the demolition of the church building at Nicomedia in 303 (*De mortibus persecutorum* 12); however, *aula ecclesiae* already built at Rome (San Clemente, SS Giovanni e Paolo) show no signs of destruction and rebuilding from the early decades of the fourth century. In fact, new and larger churches, such as San Crisogono, were being built during the period when the edicts of persecution were still in effect (303–13). It is likely that the majority of church buildings, if they were touched at all, were merely ‘seized’ by state or local officials. Implementation of the imperial orders varied from region to region. The edicts of toleration and largesse under Constantine and his co-regents consistently called for restoration of these church properties to the Christians. None the less, it appears that the period of peace and growth beginning in 313 stimulated new building programmes both on the local and the imperial level.

Eusebius’ principal example is the church at Tyre rebuilt by the young, aristocratic bishop Paulinus. At its dedication in 317 CE Eusebius himself delivered the sermon, in which he likened it to Zerubbabel’s rebuilding of Solomon’s temple (H.E. 10.4.36–45; White 1996–7: II, no. 23d). He went on to develop an extended allegory on the church as God’s new, triumphant temple of God on earth (H.E. 10.4.46–68). Despite Eusebius’ elaborate description of its embellishments, the newly rebuilt church at Tyre does not appear to be a basilica in architectural form, but rather a monumental *aula ecclesiae* (White 1996–7: I, 136; cf. Krautheimer 1979: 45–6). It is also noteworthy that the project seems to be a local initiative undertaken, at least in large measure, by the young bishop of Tyre as an act of public benefaction.¹⁵ Even so, it is clear that Eusebius was applying notions of sacred space and architecture to the church buildings both before and after the persecutions (Finney 1984: 217–25). The entry of Constantine into this process would add yet another dimension, but the architectural revolution did not occur overnight (Voelkl 1953).

Constantine’s building programme

A number of earlier theories regarding the origins of the Christian basilica attempted to find a genetic progression from houses (and the house-church) or other non-public type of architecture (White 1996–7: I, 11–17). Some relatively recent studies continue to argue that the basilica had already been introduced into Christian usage during the third century (Rordorf 1964: 127–8). Typically, these theories have carried two underlying assumptions: (a) that the basilica as monumental church architecture consciously avoided traditional Roman religious forms, and (b) that Christian liturgy was the determining factor in shaping its distinctive architectural plan.

A new consensus has emerged since the work of Richard Krautheimer (1939, 1979) and J. B. Ward-Perkins (1954). They argued instead that the basilica was a conscious feature of Constantine's policy towards the Christians in the years following 313. The plan was taken from standard forms of monumental civic architecture at Rome. Constantine and Maxentius had only a little earlier (306–10) built a new public audience hall in the *Forum Romanum*. Christian basilicas derived their basic plan and construction from such civil and imperial halls; they were then adapted self-consciously under imperial patronage to fit the new social and legal status of Christianity. This monumental type of architecture was intended to make a statement about the public acceptance and imperial favour of Christianity and to give it a formal style within the urban landscape. None the less, it shows continuities with earlier patterns of architecture, where a 'hall' of assembly had already emerged. Thus, the basilica as an accepted form of public 'assembly' architecture was a natural choice. Given its traditional civic and military functions, not to mention specific rituals employed in imperial usage, the basilica may properly be considered a type of religious architecture for corporate activity long before its Christian adaptation (Krautheimer 1979: 42). It thereby offered more grandiose elements of style as well as notions of sacred space. Liturgy was also anticipated in the choice of the architecture, but at the same time it was transformed by this choice.

Constantinian patronage set the tone for the transformation of Christian architecture, but prior to c. 350 there still was no set form of basilical church planning (Krautheimer 1979: 43). Regional variations would also evolve, and local builders experimented with designs, as in the cross-arcaded basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme at Rome (completed in c. 329 CE; Krautheimer 1979: 51). Initially at least, adaptation both of basilical form and of existing buildings was still the norm. The first Christian basilica in this strict sense was the church of St John Lateran in Rome (Figure 27.19). Originally an imperial palace and barracks complex donated by Constantine himself, the church was begun in 314, the same year that the emperor called for the church council at Arles to consider the Donatist question. The construction was completed by 319/20 (Ward-Perkins 1954: 85–7; Krautheimer 1979: 42–9). A five-aisle hall measuring 75 metres by 55 metres with an apsidal sanctuary and synthronon extending 20 metres more, it soon became the seat of the bishop of Rome. The exterior was finished in a plain plaster while the interior was lavishly decorated, no doubt from imperial gifts.

The plan of the Lateran basilica would eventually become typical of western church architecture, albeit with modifications. The classical Christian basilica comprised a central, rectangular *nave* oriented on its long axis and flanked by either two or four side aisles separated by columns. This style of construction allowed for a wide hall while still providing a high central clerestory for windows. The entry to the Lateran basilica, as with earlier *aula ecclesiae*, was not mediated through a portico or propylaion; later it became typical to front the nave proper with a lateral entry hall (or *narthex*), usually with either three or five doors. Eventually, church buildings were turned to face east, towards the rising sun, as a symbol of resurrection; however, the Lateran basilica, like San Clemente and a number of others, had its apse on the west end. Initially orientation of basilicas was not fixed and depended on the existing buildings and other factors in the sighting of the plan.

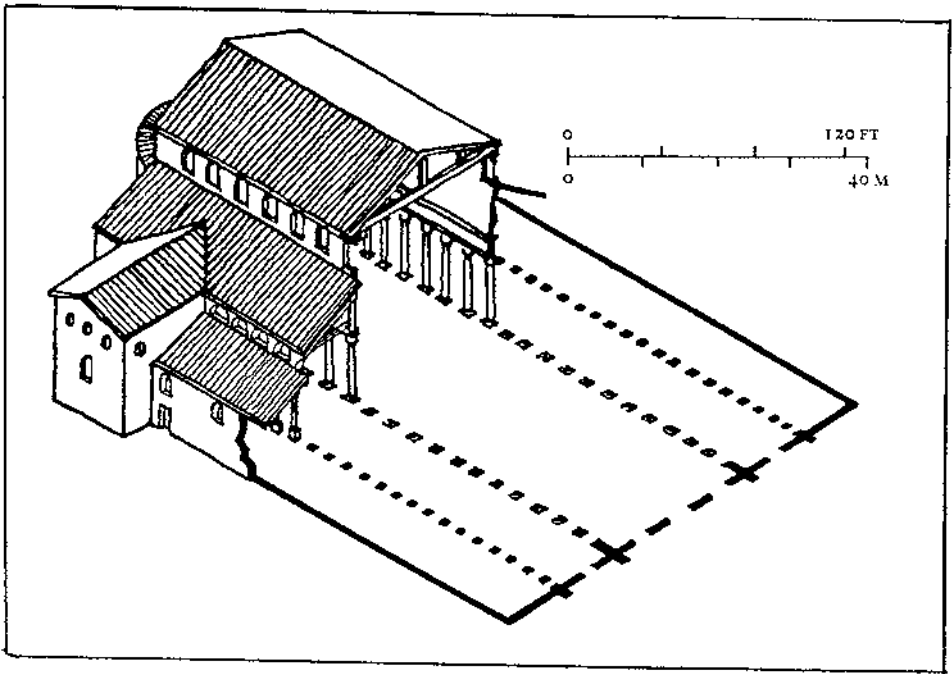


Figure 27.19 Isometric reconstruction of the Lateran Basilica, Rome. From Krautheimer (1979: 47, fig. 11).

Finally, it became common for basilicas to include an atrium or forecourt before the entrance and narthex. Rather than the traditional atrium of Roman domestic architecture, however, it was more properly a *tetrastoa* or peristyle court. The first Constantinian building to incorporate the atrium was St Peter's at Rome, begun in c. 317–19 but as a funerary basilica rather than a regular church building (Figure 27.20). Even so, it is possible that the atrium was added subsequent to the initial construction (Krautheimer 1979: 57–9). According to Eusebius, the rebuilt church at Tyre (dedicated in 317) already contained an open-air court with four *stoai*, probably a peristyle, but his description implies that it was viewed as a novel design (*H.E.* 10.4.40).

St Peter's also introduced another architectural innovation over the plan of the Lateran basilica in the form of a transverse hall (or *transept*) crossing between the nave and the apse. In other basilicas the end of the nave just before the apse served for the altar and clergy, with the bishop and others seated in the *synthronon* of the apse. At St Peter's, the transept formally and spatially divided the nave from the apse; immediately before the apse stood a *baldachino* over the altar and the venerated tombs that lay beneath the floor (Krautheimer 1979: 57). The transept did double duty, serving as a place for the clergy during regular services but also serving for commemorations of the shrine of St Peter, legendarily identified with one particular tomb structure in the earlier necropolis adjacent to the hippodrome of Nero. The church complex was intentionally placed above this necropolis by an elaborate

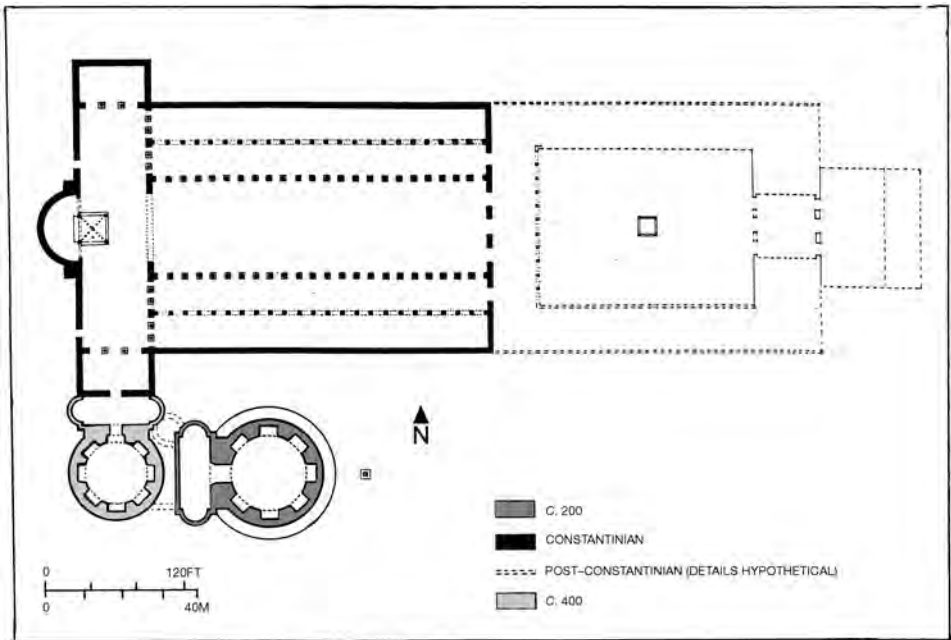


Figure 27.20 Plan of the Constantinian Basilica of St Peter's, Rome. From Krautheimer 1979: 56, fig. 22).

architectural design to adapt the foundations to the slope of the hill along which the necropolis was set (Snyder 1985: 105–15, with further bibliography). The result was a monumental edifice measuring 119 by 64 metres on the interior, not counting the atrium forecourt (Krautheimer 1979: 57).

While Constantine supported the building of basilical churches at Rome and elsewhere, the construction of St Peter's reflects another conscious element in his building programme through the architectural commemoration of Christian sacred sites. Near the end of Constantine's life Eusebius dedicated a biography to the emperor in which he recited the list of his major building projects (*Vita Constantini* 3.25–43; 51–3); his interests turned especially to the Holy Land, as it was coming to be called (Wilken 1992: 82–97). His agent in identifying key sites was his mother, Helena Augusta (c. 250–330 CE), who visited Jerusalem in 326. According to tradition she found the site of the cross and burial of Jesus, on which Constantine would build the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (Drijvers 1992). Constantine also supported the building of the Church of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives and the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem; he also gave permission to others to build churches at sites associated with events in the life of Jesus, such as the site called the house of St Peter at Capernaum where a memoria was built by Joseph of Tiberias (White 1996–7: II, 155).

The Constantinian foundations at both Golgotha (completed c. 330 CE) and Bethlehem (333) followed the basilical architecture already pioneered at Rome for the memoria of Peter. They were five-aisle basilicas with atrium forecourt

(Krautheimer 1979: 60–5). In both cases, however, the actual sacred locus was commemorated by a building of central plan extended from the apse end of the basilica proper. In the Church of the Nativity, an octagonal room memorializing the birthplace of Jesus replaced the apse proper; in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, a rotunda was connected to the basilica's apse by a porticoed court (MacDonald 1977: 20–1). Thus, Constantine's building programme anticipated the blending of central-plan buildings with the longitudinal plan of the basilica; however, central plan architecture (polygonal or rotunda type) was generally reserved for special memorial edifices, either for the dead or for gods (Krautheimer 1979: 66). At least in the beginning, the longitudinal plan of the basilica was primarily the one reserved for traditional Christian assembly and worship.

Local and regional variations

It is likely that over the next few centuries pilgrimage traffic to key sites in Rome and the Holy Land was a powerful force in disseminating the 'Constantinian' type of basilica (Krautheimer 1979: 66). By the end of the fourth century it had become pervasive, especially in the West. Even so, it must be remembered that many of the older *domus ecclesiae* and *aula ecclesiae* structures continued in uninterrupted use alongside these new constructions. At Rome itself, both San Clemente and SS Giovanni e Paolo remained unchanged until c. 400–10 at which time they were both rebuilt in basilical form (Figures 27.14, 27.15; White 1996–7: II, nos. 52–3).

In many other cases new churches were founded in the post-Constantinian era by loosely adapting existing buildings to a rudimentary basilical plan. It sometimes meant little more than spatially marking off a hall and constructing an apse in an otherwise substantial building or complex, as in the case of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme and a number of the fourth century *titular* churches of Rome (Vaes 1984–6: 316; White 1996–7: II, 437–8). This practice continued through the fourth century and into the fifth, especially in the larger cities of the Eastern empire. They were able to appropriate and convert various other types of buildings, including libraries, market halls, an odeion, and other public edifices (Vaes 1984–6: 318–21). At Ostia (Figure 27.1, locus D), for example, a bath complex and an adjacent building were adapted to form an unusual basilica (Meiggs 1973: 397–9), while the Constantinian basilica, a monumental *de novo* construction, has only recently been discovered (1996) outside the city walls on the Via Laurentiana (cf. Meiggs 1973: 395). It was also at Ostia that the wealthy Christian senator Anicius Auchenius Bassus dedicated a shrine to Monica, mother of St Augustine, after she died there in 388 CE (Meiggs 1973: 213, 399; Augustine, *Confessions* 9.10–3). Gradually, such cities were being 'Christianized' at the level of public architecture.

Even more noteworthy was the fact that Christians began to take over traditional pagan temples and convert them loosely to basilical form. This process can be seen most clearly in fifth-century Athens, where the Parthenon of the Acropolis and the Hephasteion of the agora were converted to churches; a similar fate awaited the Pantheon at Rome, the temple of Apollo at Daphne (Julian, *Misopogon* 361A–363A), and many others (Vaes 1984–6: 326–33; Hanson 1978). Despite the appeals of Firmicus Maternus (*De errore profanarum religionum* 28.6), it is not likely that many

cases of destruction or conversion of pagan religious architecture took place before the end of the fourth-century. The process was facilitated by edicts of Theodosius banning pagan *cultus* and ordering destruction of rural temples (*Codex Theodosianus* 16.10.10, 16). At the local level, however, tensions and outbreaks of violence arose on both sides. At Alexandria, Christian mobs sacked and burned the Sarapeion and murdered the philosopher Hypatia (Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.22.3–6; Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 7.15). Elsewhere, pagans rioted to preserve their local temples (Libanius, *Pro templis* 8.9; Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 7.15.11–15).

A special case in this regard is the Church of Mary, also known as the Church of the Councils, at Ephesus, which has long been thought where the Council of Ephesus of 431 was held (Krautheimer 1979: 113–15). The edifice is unique among Christian churches, a double basilica measuring some 275 metres in length with an apse on either end. It has now been found that the church structure was built in the south hall of the outer ambulatory of the Temple of Zeus Olympus (or Hadrianeion), originally built by Hadrian. The south hall was further elaborated in the early third century with an imperial cult sanctuary for Macrinus (Karwiese 1995: 314–15). The entire temple complex was destroyed by Christians in c. 400; however, the magnificent double church was not constructed until near the end of the fifth century using spoils from the temple complex (Karwiese 1995: 316). This means that the council of 431 must have been convened elsewhere in another church building so far not discovered. Ephesus' associations with the cult of Mary apparently also faced a difficult time in this period (Limberis 1995). All the same, new church constructions continued in the ruins of monumental imperial architecture. At Rome in c. 400 CE a mithraeum installed some 200 years earlier in an imperial palace was destroyed and the church of Santa Prisca built on top of it (White 1996–7: II, no. 89). Church construction put a new, 'Christian' face on the urban landscape, but often by renovating or replacing traditional forms of public religious architecture with its own.

Christians took over Jewish synagogues as well. Despite an imperial edict protecting Jews and pagans who 'live quietly and attempt to do nothing disorderly or contrary to law' (*Codex Theodosianus* 16.10.24) Christian triumphalism turned violent. The case of the destruction of the synagogue at Callinicum in 388 CE by a mob of local Christians is well known from the exchange between Ambrose and Theodosius (Ambrose, *Epistles* 40.6–7; 41.25–8). At Gerasa in the Transjordan, the local synagogue was taken over to build a church. Also near the end of the fourth century, in northern Macedonia at Stobi, another synagogue that had been in use for nearly two centuries and in two distinct phases of rebuilding was systematically destroyed and the remains incorporated into a Christian basilica (Figures 27.4, 27.21). It is thus noteworthy that some of its earlier architectural elements and dedicatory inscriptions were reused, apparently without alteration, in the new Christian edifice (White 1996–7: II, nos. 72–3).

Jews in other cities fared far better. For example at Sardis, the Jewish community was apparently given possession of one wing of the municipal bath/gymnasium complex sometime in the third century. By the late fourth century, after several stages of renovation, it had become an elaborately decorated basilica in keeping with, and perhaps influenced by, contemporaneous architectural developments

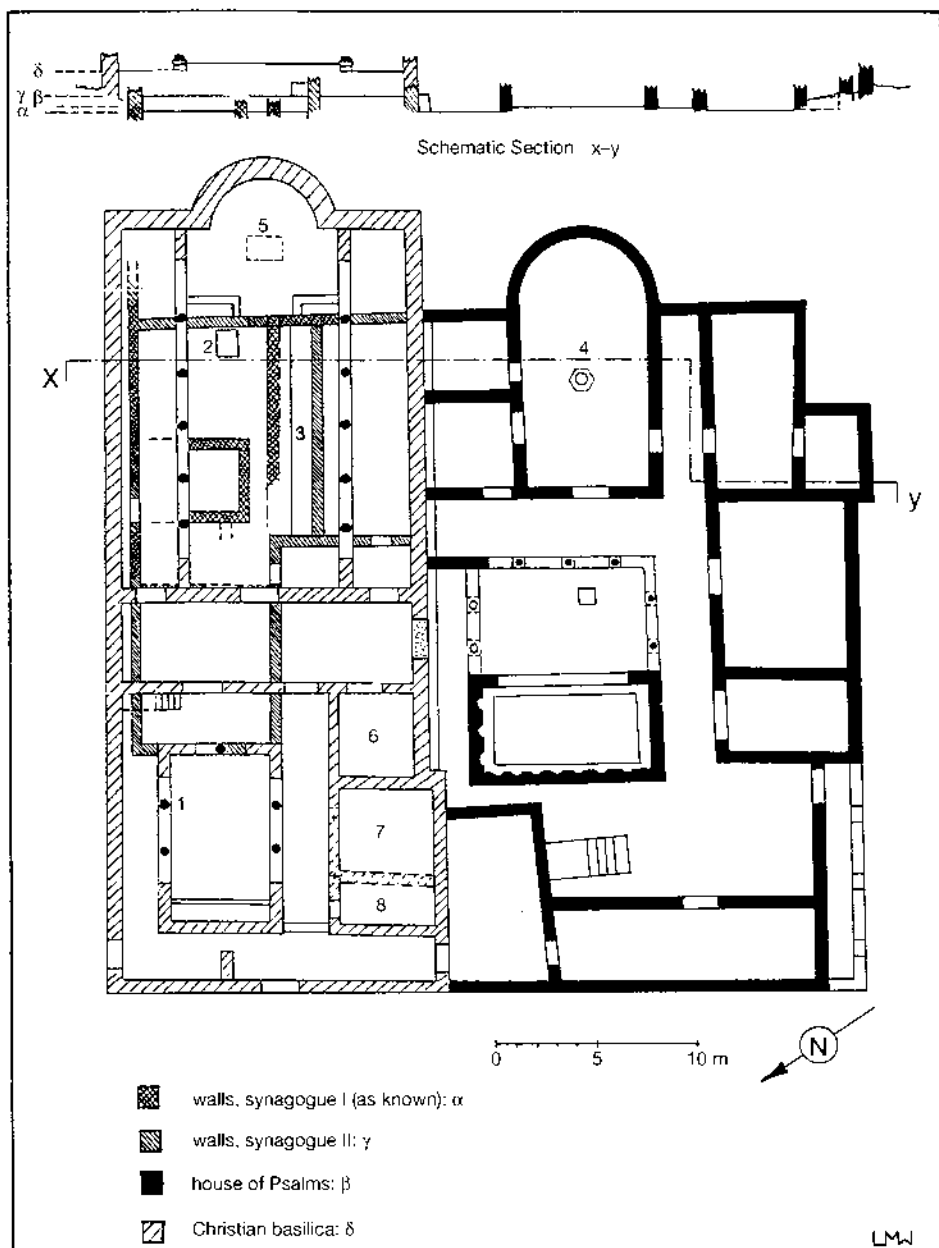


Figure 27.21 Plan of the synagogue and basilica complex at Stobi. From White (1996–7: II, fig. 38).

among Christians (Figures 27.4, 27.22). With interior dimensions of 82.5 by 18 metres, it was by far the largest synagogue now known from antiquity (White 1996–97: II, nos. 66–7). It continued in uninterrupted operation until the city was destroyed in 616 CE.

While basilical planning became predominant in the course of the fourth century, there were local and regional variations. By the early fifth century there emerged in the Aegean coastlands (Greece and Turkey) a distinctive adaptation of the basic basilical plan, typically with a much squarer nave and often with cruciform transept (Krautheimer 1979: 126–32). When later combined with central planning this style would result in some of the great domed church buildings of the Byzantine tradition, including the monumental Hagia Sophia at Constantinople as rebuilt by Justinian in 561 CE. At Philippi during the fifth century the earlier *aula ecclesiae* dedicated in the name of Paul was finally renovated as a hybrid basilica. From the exterior, the edifice appeared to be a squarish basilica with an apse on its east side (see Figure 27.17). On the interior, the nave was an octagonal colonnade with clerestory cupola; four apsidal *exedrae* were tucked into the corners. The apse extended from one of the sides of the octagon. The buildings surrounding the church were remodelled and incorporated into an ecclesiastical complex. They included a baptistery, converted from an earlier bath building, and a large complex that likely served as *Episkopeion* or bishop's residence (White 1996–7: II, no. 49, with further bibliography). A similar suggestion has been made regarding the complex around the church of St Augustine at Hippo Regius, since it was a typical western basilica but surrounded by what appear to be contiguous domestic structures (Marrou 1960).

Syrian churches were influenced by this Aegean tradition (Krautheimer 1979: 145), but also developed peculiar traits. Rather than entering on the end opposite the apse, Syrian churches often had their main doors (usually two or three) on the side of the nave (see Figure 27.23). The doors might have been designated clergy and laity, or men and women, respectively. These Syrian churches sometimes had external apses, but many had only internal apsidal constructions flanked by *exedrae*. The *ambo* – a semi-circular enclosure with interior benches and steps to a rostrum – was a peculiar adaptation to the Syrian liturgical tradition. This structure was situated in the middle of the nave and probably housed the bishop and attendants during some portion of the service (Lassus and Tchalenko 1951). Finally, many Syrian churches seem to comprise large complexes of buildings with differentiated functions, perhaps reflecting a monumental version of the different rooms of an earlier style of *domus ecclesiae* (White 1996–7: I. 122–3; Krautheimer 1979: 149–51; Lassus 1947: 22–3; Lassus and Tchalenko 1951). A good example is the church of St Paul and Moses at Dar Qita (Figure 27.23).

Other types of Christian architecture: martyria and baptisteries

As already noted, buildings with a central plan (square, polygonal, or round) had originally been associated more with memorial architecture, mausolea, and sanctuaries rather than assembly. Thus, in the pre-Constantinian period the architecture of assembly developed in a different realm and different architectural medium from the

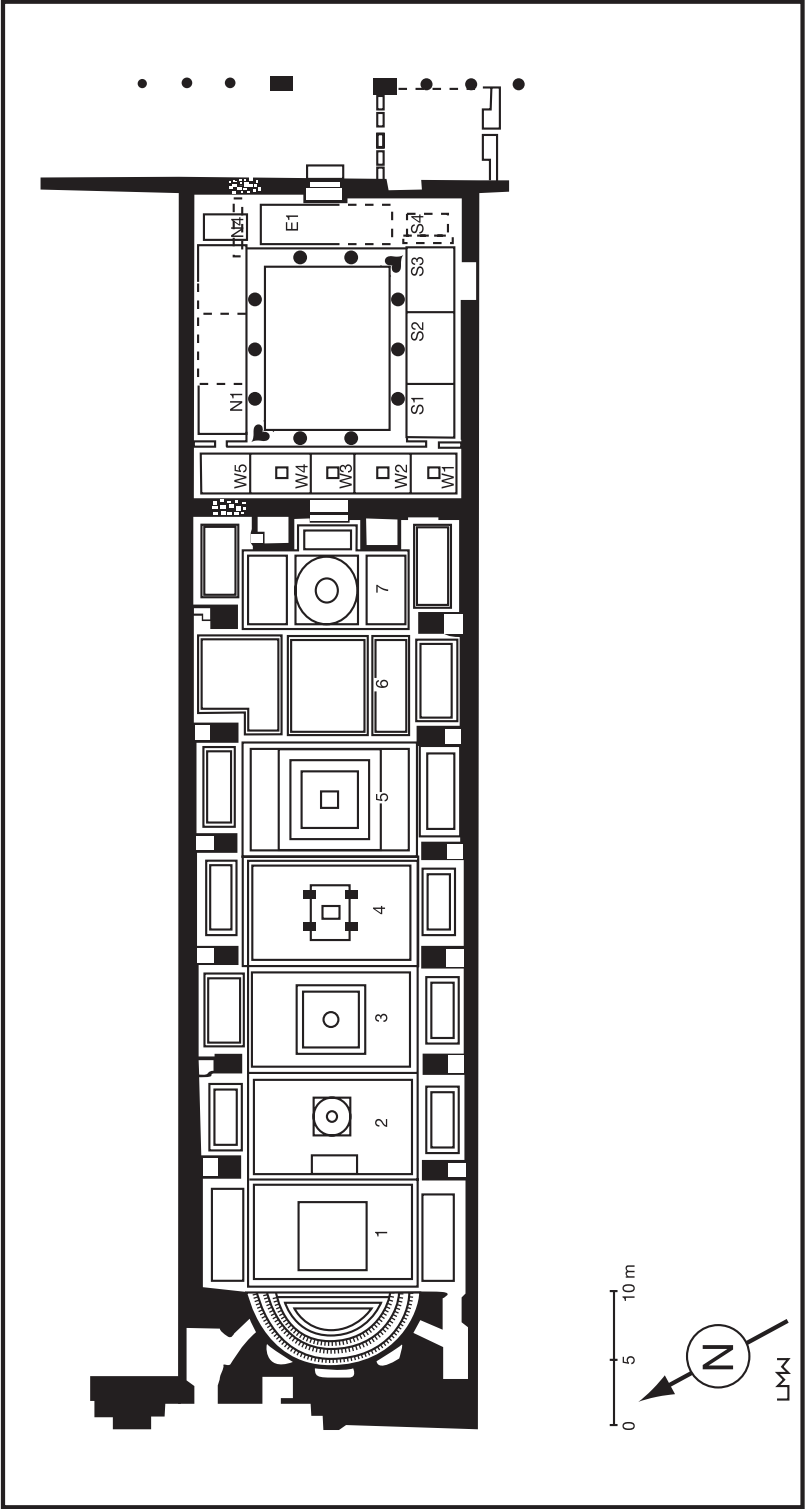


Figure 27.22 Plan of the synagogue at Sardis. From White (1996–7: II, fig. 33).

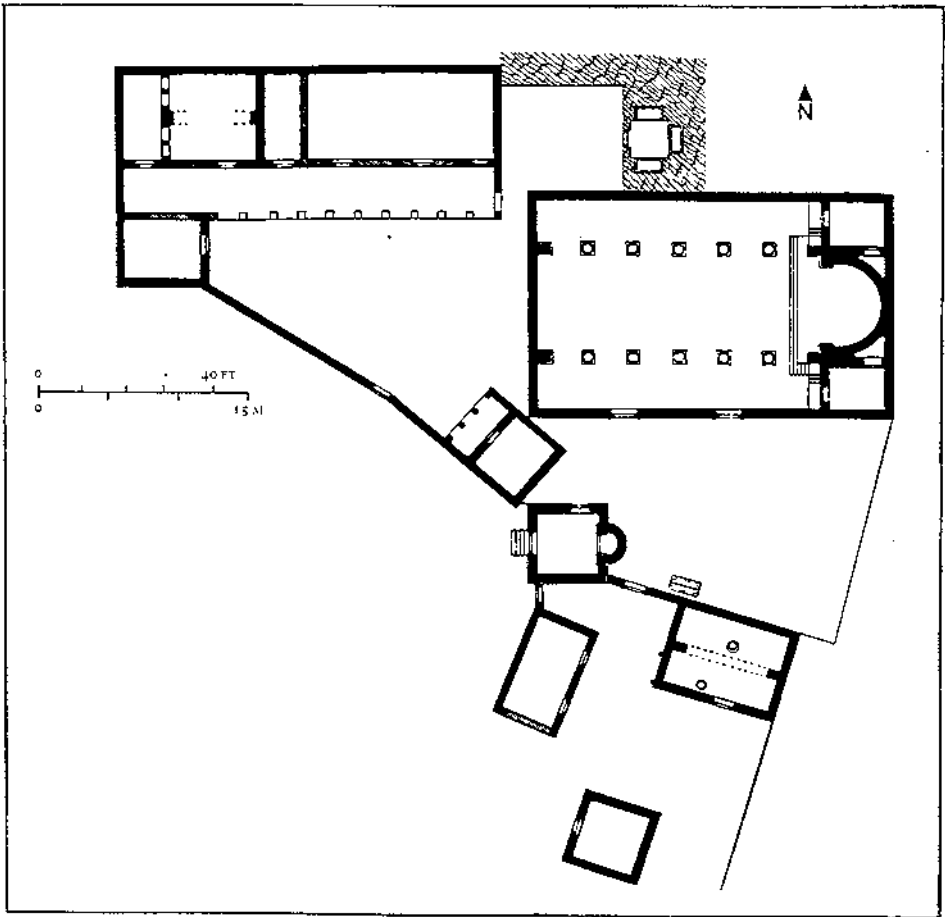


Figure 27.23 Plan of the church of St Paul and Moses at Dar Qita. From Krautheimer 1979: 150, fig. 97).

cult of the dead (Krautheimer 1979: 30). The adaptation of central plan to temple architecture began in the second-century when Hadrian had the Pantheon rebuilt after it had long been favoured for imperial mausolea. Such memorial associations probably account for appropriation of central plan edifices in conjunction with the basilicas at Golgotha and Bethlehem. Gradually, the central plan was integrated with the basilical plan especially in the Aegean regions, later the centre of Byzantine Christianity. It was especially popular for martyria or churches built to memorialize key events in the biblical tradition and in the life of Christ, or to commemorate martyrs who had died for the faith (Grabar 1946; Ward-Perkins 1966). Octagonal churches became common in the fourth to sixth centuries. When blended with the rectangular plan of the basilica it resulted in monumental domed churches, such as Hagia Sophia at Constantinople, San Vitale at Ravenna, and the church of St John at Ephesus. While central planning was thus integrated with basilical style two other

specialized appropriations continued in Christian architecture apart from the ordinary assembly and worship setting.

Martyria, catacombs and cemetery basilicas

The architecture of the martyrium continued beyond the time of Constantine. It was usually a square or central plan focusing on either a sacred locus (e.g. the monastery of St Catherine's at Mount Sinai) or the relics of a martyr and saint (church of St Philip at Hierapolis: Figure 27.24). Andre Grabar (1946) has identified several other

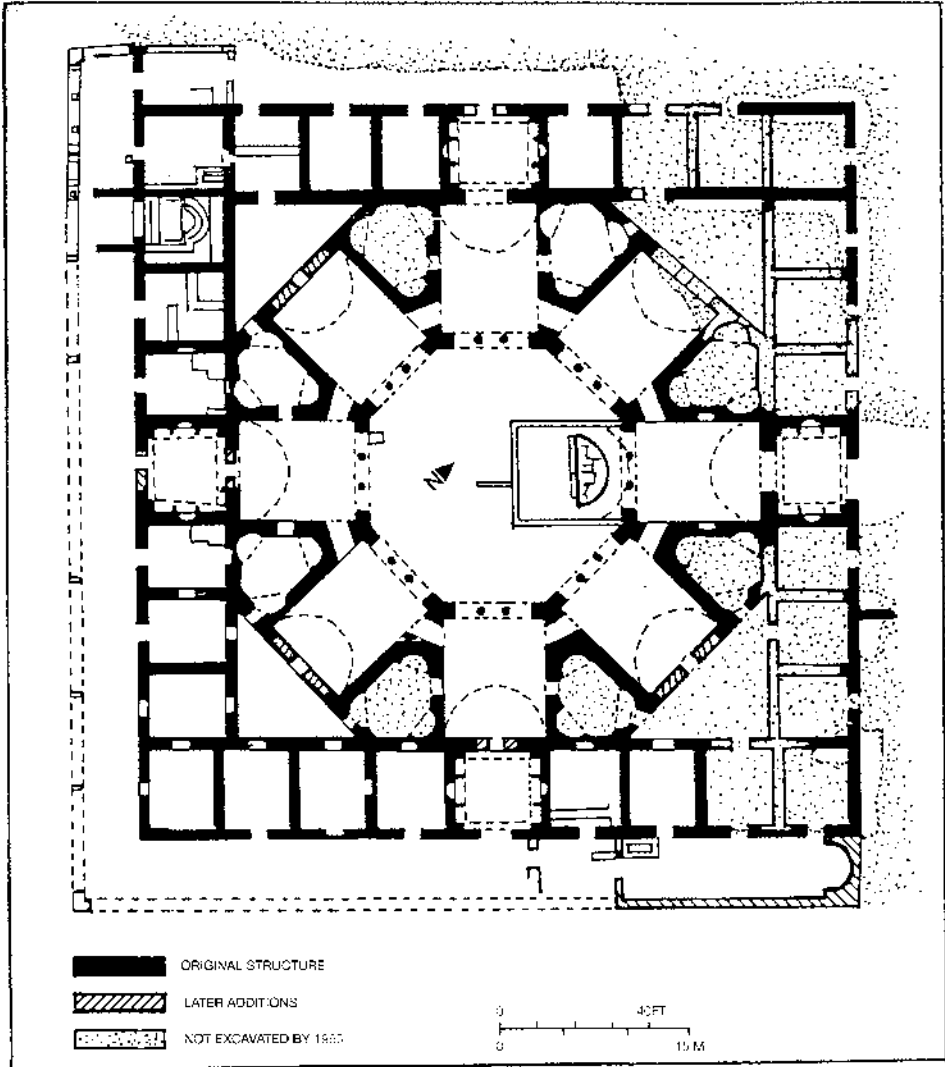


Figure 27.24 Plan of the Martyrium of St Philip, at Hierapolis (Pamukkale). From Krautheimer (1979: 171, fig. 124).

variations on this architectural scheme, including the triconch (a square building with apses on three sides) and cruciform buildings. One of the most elaborate was the church built to commemorate the life of St Simeon the Stylite at Qal'at Siman (Figure 27.25).

Cemeterial basilicas also became popular, especially around Rome. As in the case of St Peter's, they may have originated to memorialize a burial site identified with a saint or apostle, but they also needed to enclose larger burial areas while accommodating crowds during festivals of religious commemoration. St Paul's Outside the Walls marks one of the sites associated with the apostle Paul. Several of the large cemetery basilicas grew up in association with the Christian catacombs, especially San Sebastiano, also known as the Church (or *memoria*) of the Apostles. Originally a pagan necropolis, it was already being commemorated by Christians as the burial place of both Peter and Paul as early as the third-century. These legendary associations gradually transformed it into a regular place of pilgrimage, and many Christians wanted to be buried there, near the apostles. The basilica was built early in the fourth-century to sacralize both traditions (Snyder 1985: 98–104).

It was this same site that actually gave its local place name (*ad catacumbas*, 'at the hollows') to the growing practice, especially around Rome, of digging out long underground tunnels for burial (Stephenson 1978: 7, 24–5). The first tombs at San Sebastiano were typically Roman 'housetombs' dug into the tufa escarpment of the hill face. Gradually tunnels were extended far into and under the ground.

Most of the other catacombs began as small family tombs or *columbaria* with an entrance at ground level and a vault or room for multiple burials dug into the

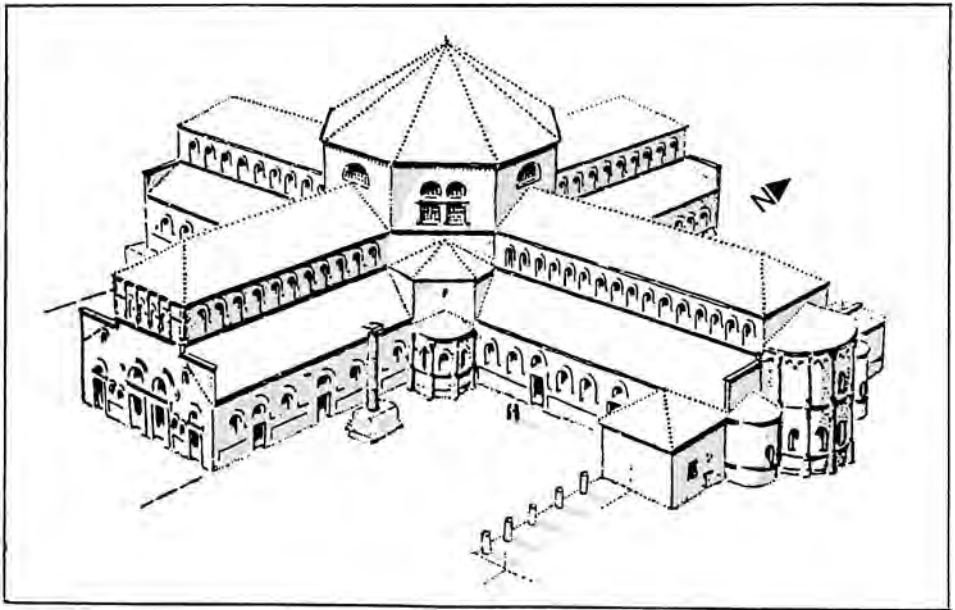


Figure 27.25 Isometric reconstruction of the Martyrium of St Simeon, at Qal'at Siman, Syria.
From Krautheimer (1979: 156, fig. 102).

ground. Beginning in the second century CE, the older Roman practice of cremation gave way to inhumation as the preferred mode of burial. All burials at Rome had to be outside the *pomerium* (or sacred boundary) of the city; in practical terms, this meant outside the city walls. A result of the growing popularity of inhumation among pagans as well as Jews and Christians was that land for burial came at a premium (Stephenson 1978: 25–44). Tunnelling into the layers of soft igneous rock (*tufa*) indigenous to Rome offered a cheap solution and also fostered a new profession: the *fossores* (or ‘grave diggers’). Although not alone, Christians figured prominently in this new enterprise. In some cases (such as the Domitilla catacomb), several independent family tombs were interconnected by tunnels, which then grew into an ant-like network of catacombs. By the early fourth century this site had been memorialized by construction of a cemeterial basilica of unusual plan above the cemetery complex.

Baptisteries

In the earliest days it seems that Christians performed baptism in natural streams or pools or wherever they could find water (*Didache* 7; Tertullian, *De baptismo* 4). By the middle of the second-century they also used Roman *balinea* or baths (White 1996–7: 110). At some point, however, Christians began to build special areas for baptism. In part it came as a result of the increasingly complex ritual process that grew around baptismal liturgy. Privacy and decorum were concerns since baptism was undertaken nude. These factors in the liturgical development likely paralleled the process of architectural adaption from house-church to *domus ecclesiae*, where specialized areas might be set aside. Gradually they were adapted and further articulated to meet the ritual and symbolic needs of baptismal liturgy.

The earliest known example of such a specially constructed baptistery comes from the *domus ecclesiae* at Dura-Europos (Figure 27.10). One modest chamber (room 6) was particularly adapted to suit their liturgical and symbolic needs. A small basin or *font* (2.57 metres long by 1.83 wide by 0.95 deep) was set partially into the floor on one end of the room. The shape of the font and its arched canopy is similar to a small shrine or tomb. It may well be that this funerary symbolism was self-consciously appropriated in conjunction with the practical considerations of a washing ritual. The decorative programme also seems to have been tailored to the baptismal liturgy as it juxtaposed scenes of death (the tomb and Goliath) with scenes of salvation from or through water (White 1996–7: II, no. 36). The font itself was barely large enough to allow for immersion, but the precise practice is uncertain. A large amphora was also found and could have been used in some way either for pouring (as recommended by the *Didache* when running water was not available), or for filling the basin.

Perhaps because of the symbolism of death and resurrection, the architecture of later Christian baptisteries seems to have a strong affinity for memorial style architecture, especially central planned buildings and/or fonts. Over four hundred early Christian baptisteries have been catalogued dating from the third to the seventh centuries. They exhibit considerable architectural diversity, especially in the external building forms. Most are artistically unexceptional and clearly designed for

utilitarian purposes. There are, however, some general features of font design and siting that suggest patterns of spatial articulation at least by the fourth to sixth centuries.

Most baptisteries were attached as rooms or as auxiliary buildings to the main church building. Eventually, it became the norm that only the bishop's church in each locality should have a baptistery; however, many cities had more than one. Other baptisteries were built as freestanding structures or complexes of rooms. The freestanding baptistery buildings were of various shapes, but central plan buildings (square, round, or octagonal) became the most popular, especially in northern Italy. The octagonal baptistery of St John at the church of Santa Thecla in Milan (built by Ambrose in *c.* 350) perhaps set the pattern for others (Krautheimer 1979: 187). The octagonal font was set in the centre of the octagonal building and the decorative programme consolidated its imagery of death and rebirth. The shape of various fonts have been correlated with this symbolism: cruciform and hexagonal fonts more with the 'tomb' imagery; round or octagonal fonts with the 'womb' of rebirth (Bedard 1951; Davies 1962; Khatchatrian 1962, 1982). Other rooms in the building served for dressing and waiting areas; at Salona the large complex seems to have included an auditorium and room for catechumens as well.

The most elaborate architectural and decorative programme in baptismal buildings was that of the Orthodox Baptistery at Ravenna (completed between 450–70 CE). The octagonal building was over 11 metres in diameter; in its centre stood a font nearly 3.5 metres in diameter, with a depth of 0.85 metres. The central mosaic of the cupola depicted the baptism of Jesus by John. Surrounding it were two concentric bands of decoration. The upper band, still in the circular dome, showed a procession of the apostles in two groups of six each led by Peter and Paul. Each carries a crown, and they meet below the axis of the cupola scene. The lower band of mosaic drew the scene down to the octagonal walls. It depicted four thrones alternating with four altars. The thrones bear a cross; the altars, one of the gospels (Kostoff 1965; Krautheimer 1979: 187–9). The iconography seems to reflect orthodox Trinitarian doctrine, over against the nearby Arian baptistery. The combined effect of the spatial and decorative programmes was designed to pilot the initiate around and through the font in a particular way so as to maximize the aesthetic, psychological, and theological significance of the experience. Art and architecture were played in harmony and thus facilitated the consolidation of Christian culture.

The Christian landscape of late Roman cities

By the end of the fifth century the cities of the later Roman empire had become predominantly Christian. Urban planning and architecture reflected continuities as well as change. Traditional temple architecture had largely been abandoned or converted to give it a Christian façade. In its place stood monumental Christian basilicas as the visual and symbolic marker of Christian identity and ritual activity. Festivals and processions at sacred centres and on holy days ordered civic life, while every neighbourhood could boast its local shrine. Some became pilgrimage centres to mark the great events and archetypal stories of the founder's life or the exemplary accomplishments of heroes past. Architecture and ritual were media of cultural

integration and construction of a new symbolic universe. But now the architectural norm was drawn from the basilica and its varied Christian adaptations and associations. They were attended by a coterie of professional clergy who figured prominently in daily social life. State and civic leaders held important seats in religious festivals. An identifiable religious architecture, great and small, now emulating the basilical style, dotting the rebuilt urban landscape. On some levels, at least, not so much had changed after all (MacMullen 1981: 131–7; 1984: 1–9).

NOTES

- 1 This is the view traditionally taken in more theologically oriented discussions of the origins of Christian architecture as reflected in Deichmann (1964); Süsslenbach (1977); and Turner (1979). On the Calvinist theological orientation towards ritual and 'sacred space' implicit within these studies, see Finney (1988: 320–328). Compare also Harnack (1908: II, 86).
- 2 The extensive bibliography on Greek and Roman architecture, city planning, and archaeology will not be recapitulated here. The reader is referred to the following for further references: Connolly and Dodge (1998); Wycherly (1978); Boethius (1978); Ward-Perkins (1974, 1981); and Jones (1940).
- 3 For the Latin *curia*, which means either the assembly or the place of assembly (the 'Senate' or the 'Senate house'), used of the Christian gatherings see Tertullian, *Apology* 39.21.
- 4 It has often been assumed that both buildings belonged to the Shipbuilders Association; however, Hermansen (1981: 71–4) makes a strong case for the Shipowners Association instead.
- 5 For collegial halls with small temples at Ostia, in addition to the Shipbuilders Association discussed above, note the House of the Triclinia (I.12.1), seat of the Housebuilders Association (*Fabri tignuarii*), even though they may be associated with another temple at V.11.1 (Hermansen 1981: 62, 64); The Guild of the Grain Measurers (*Mensores frumentarii*) located next to their warehouse (I, 19.1–3; Hermansen 1981: 65); and the *schola* of the *bastiferi* located in the precincts of the Magna Mater (IV.1.4; Hermansen 1981: 69–70).
- 6 Based on the patron's name in relation to Sergius Paulus, proconsul of Cyprus mentioned in Acts 13.7 as a 'convert' of Paul, it has been suggested that this *collegium* represents an early Christian house-church at Rome; however, there can be no certainty (White 1996–7: I, 46 with references).
- 7 So see Acts 2–5, although this might well be an idealized portrayal of the earliest days of the movement.
- 8 *m.Shabbath* 1.4; *b.Menaboth* 41b; Neusner (1979: 81–96); White (1996–7: 103).
- 9 On the vexed questions surrounding the origins of the synagogue see White (1987: 133–134); Gutmann (1975b: 72–6); Urman and Flesher (1995: xx–xxiv); Griffiths (1995); Grabbe (1995); and Flesher (1995).
- 10 White (1996–7: I, 12) and bibliography cited there; see also Groh (1995); Tsafir (1995); and Hachlili (1996: 101–2). While architectural studies have long since abandoned synagogue models as an explanatory category in basilical origins, such suppositions continue to find a voice, especially in studies of liturgy and church organization, and should be treated with caution.
- 11 The house-church in the New Testament period has become a fixture in recent discus-

sions and the bibliography is now quite lengthy. *Inter alia* see Meeks (1983: 29–30; 74–84); Malherbe (1983: 60–91); White (1996–7: I, 102–9); Theissen (1982: 73–96; 147–55); Schüssler Fiorenza (1983: 175–83); Klauck (1981); Banks (1994). Two recent works deserve special notice: Osiek and Balch (1997) (which gives the most thorough treatment of archaeological and cultural issues in housing and family life relative to the social organization of house-churches), and Ascough (1998) (with an excellent review of the scholarship).

- 12 I am grateful to Corby Finney (1988: 334–5) for recognizing the significance of these intermediate moments or transitional stages in my earlier discussions of this ‘dynamic model’.
- 13 Two other archaeological sites deserve special mention in this connection. First, at Umm el-Jimal in the Hauran (Roman Syria/Arabia), the so-called ‘Julianos church’ appears to be a later basilical hall protruding from one side of a house in a domestic insula complex. The addition of the basilical hall and apse dates to the late fourth century; however, there are indications that a portion of the edifice preserved in this construction may have already been in use at an earlier stage, but not likely for domestic functions. An earlier stage of partial adaptation for Christian usage, i.e. a possible *domus ecclesiae*, may be indicated but is awaiting further excavations (White 1996–7: II, 40).

Second, at Capernaum excavations since the mid-1960s have revealed an area of houses dating to the first century over which was built an octagonal church complex in the fifth and sixth centuries CE. In an intermediate phase, datable to the early to mid-fourth century, a simple quadrangular complex had been built, and it appears that it was meant to sacralize a particular room in the domestic complex, which then later stood at the centre point of the octagonal structure. It is clear that in the fourth century the first building was a Christian shrine built to commemorate what they thought was the house of St Peter. Although the evidence is sketchy and archaeologically problematic, it is possible that the site had already been identified with the legend of Peter at a slightly earlier stage (late third-century; so Corbo 1969: 71). However, initial claims that the edifice had already begun to function as a *domus ecclesiae* prior to the building of the fourth century memorial edifice are archaeologically unwarranted. There is no evidence that it was ever used as a regular place of Christian assembly and worship or was adapted for specifically Christian purposes prior to the fourth century project (White 1996–7: II, no. 42). Even so, the site is of considerable interest for some of the later tendencies in the development of Christian holy sites.

- 14 This phrase (*ek themeliôn*) is commonly found in building inscriptions from synagogues, mithraea, and the like, and suggests a full-scale rebuilding on an existing structure. It does not necessarily imply a prior catastrophic ‘destruction’. See White (1996–7: I, 128; II, 93, 119, 175, 177, 357).
- 15 Compare the epitaph of Marcus Julius Eugenius at Laodicea Combusta for another case of a local bishop who undertakes a special rebuilding programme ‘from the foundations’ in this period; inscription in MAMA I, 170 and White (1996–7: II, no.48).

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ART



Robin M. Jensen

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Since the earliest examples of Christian visual art usually are dated to the end of the second century, many scholars have concluded that first- and second-century Christians generally observed the Jewish prohibition against the production or use of figurative images for religious purposes – a prohibition established by the second commandment (Exod. 20:4–5). Sometimes scholars also have attributed this supposed reticence by Christians about the making of art objects to the distinction early Christians wished to draw between themselves and their idol-worshipping neighbours, whose cult statues or religious images were understood to be the work of the demons.¹ For instance, Justin Martyr cites the honouring of pagan cult images with sacrifices and floral garlands, and says that by contrast Christians know the images are lifeless, and deem it an insult to the true God to be confused with material objects that are formed or shaped by human hands (1 *Apology* 9.1–9). Likewise, both Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian assert the folly of idol worship and superstition – attributing to objects of wood or stone (some of them even slightly obscene), the qualities of infinite divinity. Tertullian deemed it more than bizarre to purchase one's gods at auction – buying and selling images of Minerva – or melting down Saturn to make a cooking pot (Clement, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 4; Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 1 and *On Idolatry* 3 and 4). And although Tertullian explicitly cites the second commandment against the making or consecration of images, he also reminded his readers that idolatry was yet still practised, as much as in ancient times, and is associated particularly with the surrounding polytheistic culture.²

Nevertheless, at the same time as ancient authors condemned the production or worship of cultic art objects, either as prohibited by the divine command or because they entrapped Christians in the idolatrous practices of contemporary culture, many of these same writers provide testimony that Christians both used and perhaps produced small, everyday objects that carried specific Christian symbols. These items – many of them still surviving in museum collections, including lamps, gems and glassware – were most likely made by ordinary artisans selling to a mixed clientele, although especially designed for Christian customers. Tertullian describes

goblets with images of the Good Shepherd, and Clement discusses which images Christians might have engraved on their signet rings (doves, fish, ships and anchors were acceptable).³ Consequently, neither early Christian theologians nor simple everyday believers seem to have rejected material signs or symbols of their faith altogether. Perhaps the lack of extant larger or more expensive art objects from the first two centuries is the result of a general lack of material wealth of first- and second-generation Christians, or (more likely) by their fairly gradual adaptation of familiar objects and the relative modesty of their early worship spaces.⁴

So while textual evidence shows that certain early Christian theologians inveighed against both the production and use of cultic art objects (a sign that such practice must have been going on therefore necessitating the admonitions), they perhaps understood functional distinctions between art that was decorative, symbolic, or didactic and cult objects that were worshipped in themselves. Ordinary Christians may have understood their smaller objects as belonging to a mundane, domestic world. When larger art objects eventually appeared, they were not understood as subjects for worship and therefore presented no danger of idolatry. Moreover, Christian converts from polytheism came from a rich material culture and were as inclined to adapt certain habits and objects to their new faith as to reject other former customs as altogether incompatible. As clear illustration of this trend to incorporate a pagan past into the artistic or material production of the emerging church, many of the earliest 'Christian' artistic motifs appear to have been modelled on Graeco-Roman prototypes, albeit reinterpreted to have particular Christian significance.

Probably the foremost example of this translation from polytheist to Christian artistic type is the Good Shepherd, displayed as a youth dressed in short tunic and boots, carrying a ram or lamb over his shoulders (see Figure 28.1). This extremely popular figure had a direct antecedent in the figure of Hermes as psychopomp (a guide to the underworld – often found in funerary contexts), and in the allegorical personification of philanthropy. Given the biblical use of the Good Shepherd as a metaphorical type for both Christ and God (e.g., John 10), Christians easily and understandably adapted this image as a symbol belonging to their particular set of beliefs (Shumacher 1977; Finney 1990).

In a similar way, a female figure shown as veiled and praying with outstretched hands (*orans*), and who in classical art personified the virtue *pietas*, comes directly into Christian iconography with little change in meaning. A third figure, a seated reader who often appears in conjunction with the shepherd and praying figure, possibly represents the classical value of philosophy. Neither the praying figure nor the philosopher portray a particular biblical figure or historical character, but rather to suggest certain values (piety or wisdom) that belong as much to Graeco-Roman religion as to the Christian faith. Other directly transferred motifs include a range of birds, animals, or floral motifs (peacocks, dolphins, lambs, grape vines, etc.), some clearly popular for their decorative functions while others may have been more symbolically significant. Sometimes the only way to distinguish certain objects or compositions as 'Christian' is their inclusion of (or close proximity to) recognizable biblical themes. For instance, a shepherd becomes definitely identified as a Christian Good Shepherd (rather than as Hermes) when it occurs next to an image of Jonah or of John the Baptist.



Figure 28.1 The Good Shepherd from the Catacomb of Callixtus. Photo Estelle Brettman, with the permission of the International Catacomb Society.

In conclusion, what scholars might recognize as a distinctly ‘Christian’ body of iconographic themes only began to appear around the year 200 CE. Prior to that time, Christians may have produced works of art, but historians may not be able to distinguish them from examples belonging to the wider cultural context (Finney 1994: 109). Thus in its earliest stage, the basis for characterizing certain materials as ‘early Christian art’ is primarily iconographic (noting certain themes or motifs) rather than stylistic or functional. In other words, certain new or uniquely Christian figures began to appear, often on objects or in places common to both pagans and Christians (e.g., lamps and tomb walls). Neither the setting, medium, nor style of the art was necessarily Christian. In almost every case, only the content or subject matter reveals the object’s particular Christian character and significance. For instance, archaeologists have found decorative terracotta wall tiles bearing representations of the Good Shepherd, Noah, Abraham offering Isaac, or Jesus raising Lazarus – images that conveyed aspects of the Christian faith, illustrated key Bible stories, and identified their owner’s religious affiliation.

CHRONOLOGICAL PERIODS

Early Christian art may be roughly divided into two general periods, distinguished partly by iconographic motifs but also partly by certain key transitions in style after the initial stages. Beginning during the era of the Severan emperors (180–240 CE), the earliest phase generally coincides with the last century of pagan rule, and covers the period of the Decian and Diocletianic persecutions, lasting through to the elevation and conversion of the emperor Constantine. During this early stage, Christian art shows the most influence of classical or pagan Roman prototypes in its conventions, decorative motifs and style, as well as much of its subject matter. For instance Christ may be represented as (or shown in the guise of) the Good Shepherd, Orpheus, or Sol Invictus. Popular decorative motifs, including grape vines or dolphins, were transferred to Christian settings and probably were understood to have particular Christian symbolic significance. Other themes of more clearly Christian character were extremely popular during this period and include a cycle of scenes from the Jonah story (by far the most frequent), presentations of Noah in the ark, and Moses striking the rock in the wilderness.

The second period of Christian art covers the era of the Constantinian dynasty through the early sixth century, the time when the church passed from being persecuted to being the officially recognized state religion. The art of this era was largely supported by the wealth of the imperial family or new Christian aristocracy, and certain motifs that characterize it have come to be commonly identified as exemplary of a so-called ‘imperial style’.

The conversion of the Roman imperial family was a watershed moment for the church and, by extension, for Christian art. Almost as soon as the emperor Constantine gave his patronage to the Christian cause, he in turn financed the building and rich artistic embellishment of the first great public Christian buildings in Rome, the Holy Land, and especially in his new capital in Constantinople – the ‘New Rome’. Consequently, Christian art in this period moved from being largely private or funereal to being public and monumental in character. As part of this transition, certain motifs from the earlier phase dropped out (e.g., the Good Shepherd and Jonah) and new iconographic themes emerged (e.g., Christ enthroned or giving the law to his apostles – the *traditio legis*).

This second phase actually bridges the late Roman and the early Byzantine eras, ending with the reign of the emperor Justinian (527–65), whose artistic patronage helped to make his western capital, Ravenna, into a city best known today for its glorious mosaics. However, Ravenna, which replaced Milan as the western capital in the early fifth century, had already been a centre of art and architecture well before Justinian’s general Belisarius regained it for the Byzantine empire from the Ostrogoths. Ravenna’s buildings therefore are a combination of artistic work that was begun during the reigns of Honorius (395–423), continued under the Ostrogothic ruler Theodoric (493–526), and finally completed after the re-establishment of the exarchate in Ravenna in 535.

In brief, while the definitive characteristic of ‘Christian’ art in the earlier period was its iconography (i.e. subject matter and themes), the criteria for such identification expanded to include both context and function during the post-Constantinian

era when the material, economic, and social status of Christianity changed radically. While in the third century distinguishable Christian and pagan art works are just beginning to emerge, and are only identifiable by their content, by the first decades of the fifth century, and through the early Byzantine era, the culture was so permeated by Christian interests that the categories 'secular' and 'sacred' were less sharply defined, and the appellation 'Christian art' came to be as much defined by context or patron as by iconographic programme.

PROVENANCE AND CONTEXT

Aside from the lack of first- or second-century evidence, the extant corpus of pre-Constantinian Christian art is limited in two additional respects. First, much of the evidence is of limited geographical provenance. Although significant exceptions exist, most extant examples of earliest Christian art derive from the environs of Rome. In fact, among the earliest and most significant examples of Christian art are frescoes on the walls of the third-century Christian catacombs found just outside Rome itself. The oldest known example of these underground burial sites, the Catacomb of Callistus, was named for an early bishop of Rome (c. 217–22) who, while still a deacon of the church, was put in charge of this first subterranean Christian cemetery (Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* [*the Philosophumena*] 9.12.14).

Roman-Italian dominance of extant pre-Constantinian Christian imagery is not absolute, however. Scholars have assumed that the Cleveland marble sculptures, generally dated to the third century, came from a Christian family tomb in Asia Minor. Asia Minor may also have been the source of partially finished marble sarcophagi that were sent to workshops in Rome for completion. Additionally, ateliers in Gaul produced many surviving examples of early Christian relief sculpture on sarcophagi, although the influence of Roman workshops is apparent in their technique and style.⁵ Archaeologists have also discovered what may be some third-century frescoes in catacombs in North Africa and Thessalonica. The single most important pre-Christian monument, moreover, may be the mid-third-century house church in Dura-Europos, which was located on the Roman/Parthian border (modern-day western Syria). When archaeologists excavated the site in the 1940s, they found the baptistery of this converted domestic structure with its ceiling and wall frescoes intact, thus discovering a unique example of early Christian architecture and interior decoration (see Figure 28. 2).

To a great degree, the limited geographical provenance of early Christian art is an accident of history and, unlike the lack of pre-third century data, not a factor that can be explained by the nature of the data itself. Much of the other non-Roman material, which must have existed, has been lost – presumably to wars, outbreaks of iconoclasm, or the continuous urban renewal of cities and towns. Accordingly, the fact that existing artistic data derive from Rome is neither positive proof of Roman superiority in the crafts nor of the particular authority of the church at Rome at this early date. Although Rome was the political centre of the empire, the Roman church (and presumably Roman Christian art) was distinctly regional and, although

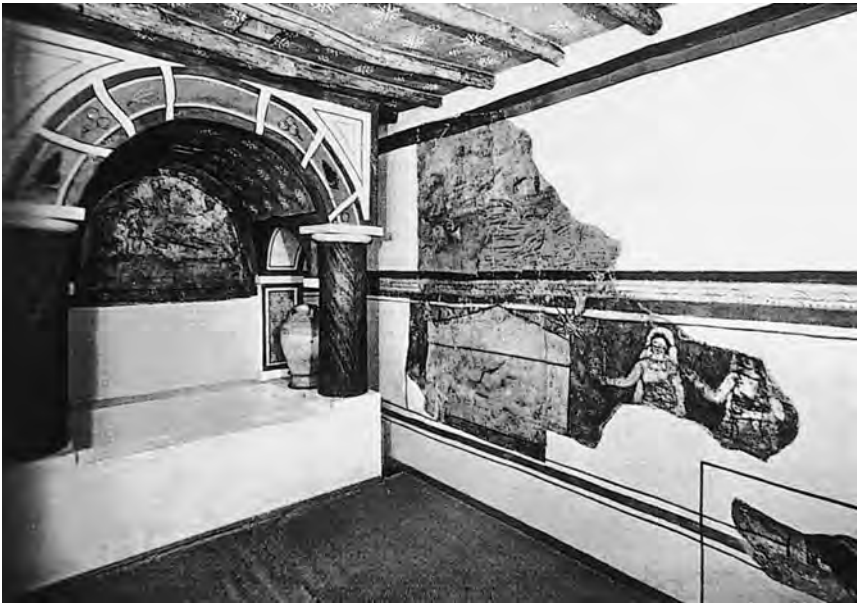


Figure 28.2 The baptistery from the Christian building at Dura-Europos. With the permission of the Yale University Art Gallery.

influential, not necessarily dominant in matters of theology or artistic style.⁶ Early Christian theology and practice in other regions of the Roman empire, including Spain, Egypt, Syria, Greece, the British Isles and North Africa, show much regional character and variation – variations that are paralleled by stylistic and thematic distinctions in the surviving examples of non-Roman Christian art from a slightly later period.

The second, and perhaps more important, limiting characteristic of earliest Christian art is the fact that it derives largely from funereal contexts. The major portion of extant pre-Constantinian artwork appears to have served primarily as decoration for tomb chambers or stone coffins – the two largest bodies of Christian art before the mid-fourth century are catacomb frescoes and relief sculpture on marble sarcophagi. Even certain rare small sculptures in the round, or everyday or domestic items bearing recognizably Christian symbols (e.g., pottery lamps), mostly derive from sepulchral environments.

The significance of this fact is difficult to determine given the lack of comparative material from non-funereal contexts. Apart from the unique example of the house-church at Dura-Europos, and a few rare examples from other parts of the world, including Aquileia in north-eastern Italy (whose double basilica may date from both before and after the Constantinian era), scholars may only speculate whether church walls or pavements were regularly decorated with religious imagery (and destroyed in the rebuilding process) and, if so, whether that religious imagery would have been similar to the art work found in the catacombs. The Spanish Council of Elvira in the early fourth century condemned the decoration of church walls with religious paint-

ings (Canon 36); a prohibition that suggests that such decorations existed. The acts of the council, however, omit any description of the offending paintings (Grigg 1976). Later in the fourth century, Paulinus, the aristocratic monk and later bishop of Nola, described the paintings he had commissioned for the church he had built and dedicated to the saint, Felix, as primarily of saints and biblical figures. Paulinus, obviously uncomfortable with the use of art in churches, defends his use of art by giving it a didactic purpose – to counter the popularity of pagan idols and to elevate and inspire his Christian flock (*Poems* 27 and 32).

Nevertheless, based on the single example of the Dura-Europos baptistery and some of the stylistic parallels to Roman wall painting in domestic structures, it seems likely that church-wall frescoes or floor mosaics shared common themes and similar painting techniques with the catacomb frescoes. The Dura frescoes included representations of the Good Shepherd, Adam and Eve, the healing of the paralytic, and the woman at the well – all scenes also found in the catacombs. Even so, the sample is too small for any clear assertions about either the existence or the specific appearance of religious images in other Christian buildings.

During the fourth century, both the provenance and the context of Christian art were radically changed. Churches were built as public buildings, paid for from the imperial treasury, decorated by the best artisans, and patronized by wealthy families. At the same time as art began to appear on the walls and in apses of basilicas in Rome, Constantinople, Greece, and the Holy Land, Christians apparently ceased to use the catacombs for their burial places. By the end of the fourth century the primary venue of Christian art was entirely changed. Whereas in the earliest period the distinction between Christian and pagan art was almost entirely in their different themes or iconographical motifs, by the mid-fourth century the setting of the art was determinative. A peacock on the wall of a Roman tomb might have been painted either for a pagan or for a Christian client, while a peacock in mosaic above the arch of an apse in a Christian basilica clearly had a Christian symbolic significance. In time, Christian art made for church buildings or public Christian worship completely dominated the scene, while the more private funerary art faded into the background.

WALL PAINTING

Apart from the house-church at Dura-Europos (and possibly other early examples such as the fourth-century Christian buildings in Lullingstone, Kent), extant frescoes that belong to the earliest period of Christian art mostly appeared in a funerary context, on the walls and ceilings of tomb chambers in the Roman catacombs (Wilpert 1903). Among the best known of these are the paintings in the catacombs of Callistus, Domitilla, and Priscilla. Although such cemeterial art mainly had died out by the fifth century, it continued into the Constantinian era, and some of the most significant examples of fourth-century wall painting come from the catacombs of Saints Peter and Marcellinus and the new catacomb under the Via Latina, both also in Rome.

Fresco painting on tomb walls had been a Roman custom prior to the Christian

adaptation of that tradition. The continuity with this pagan Roman practice may clearly be seen in the composition and style of the paintings themselves, along with many of the decorative elements (borders, urns, birds, garlands, etc.) – features that also may be seen on the walls of Roman villas of the same period. In fact, many of the earliest paintings contained subjects that were as likely to have been pagan as Christian in meaning, including the ubiquitous praying figure (*orans*), the shepherd with sheep, or a funeral banquet (see Figure 28.3).

Although still within the broad tradition of Roman wall painting, the particular technique or style of the Christian catacomb frescoes was often more sketchy and expressionistic than the more finely crafted pagan examples, and these images are sometimes disparagingly described by historians as being crude, of poor quality, or carelessly executed. These features, however, may be less due to a lack of skill, time, or money expended, and more the result of an attempt to achieve a symbolic shorthand designed to communicate certain aspects of the faith. Figures were often awkwardly rendered with a limited colour palette, sometimes difficult to identify, flat and two-dimensional, and supported by a minimum of narrative details. Noah, for example, is shown standing with his arms up in prayer in a mail-box-like ark, while a dove often flies into the scene carrying an olive branch in its beak. This simple or abbreviated image may be all that is necessary to remind the viewer of the entire story and its significance, making other details (Noah's wife, sons, elaborate boat stocked with lots of animals), or even careful rendering of the figures, superfluous.



Figure 28.3 Funeral banquet from the Catacomb of Callistus. Photo Estelle Brettman, with the permission of the International Catacomb Society.

Furthermore, the paintings in the Roman catacombs were not intended for a large public audience, but were private and personal in their character. They were in small spaces, neither well-lit nor much frequented. Unlike the ancient Egyptians, Christians did not believe that tomb paintings had particular value to the deceased in transition to the afterlife. The function of these paintings was most likely entirely devotional and decorative – meant to comfort, inspire, or instruct relatives or friends during their regular visits to the graves of loved ones on festival or anniversary days.

The subject matter of these paintings was primarily based on biblical stories or characters as well as adapted from such classical Roman prototypes as the shepherd or praying figure. Iconographic references to biblical stories are the primary basis for identifying these paintings as Christian in character. The most common of these biblical themes are Jonah (usually shown in a unique three or even four-part narrative sequence); Moses striking the rock to get water in the wilderness; Abraham about to offer his son Isaac; Noah in his ark; and Daniel flanked by lions. Representations of New Testament stories also appear, but are outnumbered by the Hebrew Bible images almost five to one. Those New Testament scenes that occur mostly show Jesus in the role of teacher, healer, or wonder-worker. The most frequent images include Jesus healing the paralytic or the woman with the haemorrhage, multiplying loaves and fishes, or raising Lazarus from the dead.⁷ Also depicted is the meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan woman from John 4 (see Figure 17.1). Scenes portraying the incarnation, birth, passion or resurrection of Jesus are almost unknown in this early period.

The preference for art images based on Old Testament narratives has led scholars to theorize that Roman artists were particularly influenced by Jewish iconography, or had access to certain illustrated bibles of the Jews – bibles that provided the basic models of many of the compositions in the Christian catacomb paintings.⁸ However, no such illuminated Bibles have been discovered, and the unique example of Jewish art from this early period, the wall frescoes from the synagogue at Dura-Europos, show quite different biblical scenes and, in the few examples of parallel scenes, have very different compositions. Furthermore, the Hebrew scripture-based images that appear in the catacombs are usually abbreviated rather than detailed, and not always what to modern eyes would be obvious choices. For instance, Moses striking the rock is far more common in Christian catacomb art than Moses and the burning bush or even Moses receiving the Law.

The predominance of Old Testament motifs may in part lie in the tradition of scriptural interpretation of the early church. Whether in homilies, catechetical lectures, or in liturgy (prayers and hymns, in particular), preachers and theologians constantly held up episodes or characters from the Old Testament as figures or ‘types’ referring to the life of Jesus Christ and the salvation offered by the church. The Hebrew Bible was, in fact, the basic scripture of the early Christian church, and understood to foretell the coming of Christ and his message of deliverance from sin and death. The paintings in the catacombs can be understood as interpreting the texts in the same way, although in visual rather than in written form. Thus, representations of Jonah point to the death and resurrection of Christ as well as to the death and rebirth of Christian baptism. Abraham offering Isaac was a way to both prefigure and suggest the sacrifice of the beloved Son on the cross. This form of

visual exegesis also may account for the lack of certain narrative details in the scene, or (to our eyes) the preference for more obscure stories over the obvious. All that was needed was the visual cue as reminder – a symbol that carried far more meaning than its simplicity would suggest (Jensen 1993).

One particular image, that of John the Baptist baptizing a youthful (or even childlike) Jesus in the waters of the Jordan, is almost the exception to the otherwise general presentation of Jesus as wonder-worker or healer. Along with certain other figures or motifs that have no particular scriptural referents (e.g., a banquet scene, images of a fish and loaves, or grapevines ripe with fruit), these images may be understood as representing actual liturgical events of the early church, or perhaps symbolizing certain important events in the life and worship of the early Christian community. Baptism and participation in the Eucharistic meal not only were critical points in the communal life of early Christians; they were the liturgical signs that incorporated the deceased's hope of both the general resurrection and Messianic banquet at the end of time. Thus, early Christian painting must be understood not as literal illustration, but rather as a shorthand method to remind the viewer of the deeper or hidden meanings those stories or symbols held for both their religious life and self-identity.

During and after the Constantinian era, the range of subjects increased for all of Christian art, at the same time as the art began to appear in large public buildings instead of in more private, funereal contexts. New biblical stories appeared in paintings, including the crossing of the Red Sea and the finding of Moses by the Pharaoh's daughter. Meanwhile, certain previously popular figures began to disappear, including the Shepherd, Jonah, and Noah. In general, however, wall paintings were replaced, first by the monumental mosaics of the fifth and sixth centuries, as well as by manuscript illuminations, carved ivories, and images on liturgical implements of silver and gold, with the most characteristic motifs of the new era appearing on these monuments or on the carved sarcophagi of the fourth and fifth centuries.

RELIEF SCULPTURE ON SARCOPHAGI

Many of the same iconographic motifs that appeared in paintings from the early period also appeared on the relief carvings of stone sarcophagi created for Christian patrons. Most Roman sarcophagi (literally 'flesh-eaters' – a term applied by later historians) were lidded stone coffins designed to be placed against a wall. Usually box-shaped, but sometimes rounded like bathtubs, backs were left unfinished while the other three sides (front and the two ends), as well as the lids, were decorated with relief sculpture. Only the most wealthy classes could afford to bury their dead in this way, and because of their great expense sarcophagus reliefs often were of a different type or quality of craftsmanship from the wall paintings. Sarcophagi were carved with drills and chisels in white marble, but occasionally also in limestone. They were sometimes painted lightly to make them polychrome but the use of colour was normally restrained. In the earlier era, most sarcophagus images were portrayed on the same level or register, and by the end of the third century designs began to become more detailed, even crowded with smaller figures and multiple scenes. In

the early fourth century, double-registered sarcophagi gave more structure or order to the multiple images. The quality ranges from high relief with beautifully polished details to flatter and less finely carved work, often in a lower grade of marble or softer limestone. Like the tomb frescoes, stone sarcophagi were produced by workshops of artisans who also served a pagan clientele and adapted common Roman motifs for their Christian customers, although it seems most likely that the designs were more or less customized for each client. These common motifs included shepherds milking or carrying animals over their shoulders, praying figures (*orans*), seated readers, and scenes of small children (*putti*) harvesting wheat or grapes. One or two extant sarcophagi from this period show that faces of the seated reader or praying figure may have been left unfinished in the expectation that portraits of the deceased could have been added to these particular figures. Later, such portraits would have been added to medallions (often of scallop shell design) in the centre of the front frieze.

The earliest Christian sarcophagi can be dated to the late third century. Among the best known and most beautiful is the so-called Jonah sarcophagus, now in the Museo Pio Cristiano in the Vatican and dated to approximately 270 CE (Figure 28.4). The main image on this sarcophagus portrays Jonah being tossed overboard and into the mouth of the waiting sea creature, and then being spat up on dry land again. Jonah reclines nude on the dry ground in a posture similar to depictions of the sleeping Endymion of Greek legend (another familiar Roman art motif). The water in which Jonah's boat floats also supports Noah's ark and a number of fish and sea creatures being caught by anglers on a bank. The boat's mast breaks into the upper portion of the sarcophagus' frieze, which contains images of Jesus raising Lazarus and Moses striking the rock to give water to the Israelites in the wilderness.

Sarcophagi produced for Christian clients in the fourth century showed fewer of the pagan influences in their iconographic programmes and motifs became exclusively Christian in character. The Shepherd, praying figure, or seated reader disappeared and their places were taken by familiar biblical images. Most of the same biblical themes that had appeared in catacomb painting found their way onto



Figure 28.4 Jonah cycle from the late third-century 'Jonah sarcophagus' in the Museo Pio Cristiano, Vatican. Photo Graydon Snyder.

the often crowded fronts of sarcophagi, including the most popular of the Old Testament images – Adam and Eve, Moses (or Peter) striking the rock, Abraham about to slay his son, or Daniel with his lions. Comparatively more New Testament images appeared on the sarcophagi, but the standard portrayals of Jesus as healer and wonder-worker remained consistent. Alternating with images from the Hebrew scriptures are representations of Jesus healing (the paralytic, the man born blind, the woman with the issue of blood, etc.) and working wonders (e.g., changing water to wine at Cana, multiplying the loaves and fishes, and raising Lazarus: Figure 28.5).⁹

However, many new iconographic themes appeared on these expensive funerary monuments in the mid-fourth century. Among these new themes is Christ handing a scroll (the ‘new law’, the *traditio legis*) to his apostles (Figure 28.6). In these images Christ either sits on a throne-like chair (sometimes with his feet on the head of the God, Caelus), or stands on the rock of Golgotha out of which spring the four rivers of paradise symbolizing the beginning of the new creation. The gesture of passing a scroll is based upon the traditional gesture of the transfer of imperial authority or power from the Roman political scene. Christ here is delegating his authority to his apostles – his earthly magistrates – from his position in heaven.

To this dignified and hieratic scene come other new themes to the programmes of fourth-century sarcophagi. The magi are portrayed bringing their gifts to the Christ-child, and Christ is depicted entering Jerusalem riding on a donkey, for example. However, perhaps, the most striking additions are the presentations of



Figure 28.5 Double-registered mid-fourth-century sarcophagus from the Museo Pio Cristiano in the Vatican, with various Old and New Testament scenes. Photo Robin Jensen.



Figure 28.6 Late fourth-century sarcophagus showing the *traditio legis*, now in Arles. Photo Robin Jensen.

scenes from Christ's passion, a theme that is particularly noteworthy at this time because of its earlier absence from Christian art (and its later great popularity).

The actual crucifixion – Jesus hanging on the cross – is omitted from these compositions (as it is generally before the fifth century), but other episodes in the story are shown, including Christ's arrest, Simon of Cyrene carrying the cross, Jesus' crowning with a wreath (laurel instead of thorns), and appearance before Pilate. These separate scenes, sometimes combined with figures from the Old or New Testaments (e.g., Adam and Eve, Abraham offering Isaac, Daniel, the raising of Lazarus, or arrest of Peter) are often each separated into architectural niches, set off by columns or gabled roofs. In the centre niche of two of these sarcophagi, now in the Vatican Museo Pio Cristiano, stands an empty cross surmounted by a laurel wreath enclosing the chi-rho monogram. Below, two sleeping soldiers appear, while above their heads, perched on the arms of the cross, are two doves. The whole composition suggests triumph and victory rather than suffering and sacrifice. In fact, the empty cross with the wreath looks very much like the Constantinian imperial insignia, or military standard, and the parallelism may have been intentional.

The omission of the image of Christ's actual suffering on the cross and replacement by images of a hero standing nobly before the Roman governor, or with symbols of victory, may arise from a desire to emphasize the triumph of resurrection rather than the pathos of painful death. Since theological writings from the same period are in no way reserved about the crucifixion itself, it cannot be that the crucifixion was of minor importance. Rather it may have been that an artistic presentation of Christ's passion on the cross itself was deemed too graphically disturbing or the subject too holy to be appropriate for viewing. The figure of Abraham offering Isaac may have been substituted as a 'type' of the crucifixion and intended to convey the meaning of the event (Jensen 1993: 85–100). When crucifixion portrayals began to appear in art, they may have been modelled upon an image found in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (no longer extant). Some of the earliest such images were imprinted on small pilgrimage tokens (ampullae of pottery or lead) that pilgrims carried back to the West from the Holy Land.

The implications of this iconographic shift during the fourth century, shown so clearly on the sarcophagi of the period, are several. First the new presentations of Jesus as calm and heroic, resurrected and enthroned and giver of the new law, show a definite shift from an earlier artistic stress on Jesus as healer, teacher, or wonder-worker. Moreover, these new images are more dogmatic in nature and less consistently narrative-based. The emphasis of the imagery is on Jesus' divine person who is judge, heavenly lord, and redeemer, rather than on Jesus' earthly ministry.

Changing social or political circumstances may explain this shift away from the earlier scripturally oriented images towards those with more dogmatic emphases. Often the shift in Christianity's status and patronage has been cited to explain representations of Christ as an enthroned heavenly king, sometimes with his feet placed upon the mantle of the god of the heavens, Caelus. Such an image has long been assumed to have political associations – Christ as ruler of the cosmos is iconographically paralleled with the emperor as ruler of the world below. These motifs are identified as imperial, and supportive not only of the Christian faith but also of the emperor cult.¹⁰ This would suppose that Christian visual art of this era was used to advance the programme of the Christian emperors, a programme aimed at unifying the empire both under one faith and under one ruler who was granted authority from the Christian god.

Recently this hypothesis has been re-examined and refined (Mathews 1993). Scholars have challenged the idea that fourth-century art in some sense 'sold out' to imperial interests and have pointed out the similarities of Christ in this iconography with the ruling pagan gods, Jupiter and Dionysus in particular. As Christianity went from being the personal faith of the ruling family to the official religion of the state, images of the pagan gods were replaced with images of Christ, sometimes shown in remarkably similar guise.¹¹ Thus many of the new dogmatic themes of fourth-century painting and sculpture may be attributed to the triumph and power of the Christian god and Christian teachings over the traditional (but dying) Roman pantheon.

A related, but somewhat different, explanation for the changing in iconographic motifs in the fourth century may be the shift from the private, funerary context of art to a public and monumental venue. Enormous sums of money were used to erect grand buildings and decorate them. They were intended to impress the masses of both locals and pilgrims who daily crowded into them. The art in these spaces was not commissioned to console the bereaved or to make a statement about particular beliefs of individual Christians, but to express the glory, as well as the faith, of the church triumphant. Many favourite scriptural themes and sacramental motifs remained, but through the fourth and fifth centuries new pictures appeared: representations of a majestic Christ, ruling and judging; the heroes of the church (apostles, martyrs, prophets, and patriarchs); the nativity with Mary and the magi; and scenes from Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion. The apse mosaic of Hosios David in Thessalonica (c. 425) shows Christ as the enthroned One as described in Revelation 4, sitting on a rainbow, surrounded by the four living creatures (ox, lion, eagle and man). This theme of apocalyptic majesty is paralleled in the slightly earlier apse mosaic of Sta Pudenziana in Rome (c. 400), which adds the apostles and female personifications of the churches of the Jews and the gentiles offering them wreathes of victory (see Figure 28.7).



Figure 28.7 The apse in St Pudenziana, Rome. Photo Robin Jensen.

SCULPTURE IN THE ROUND

Few examples of early Christian sculpture in the round exist, which suggests that Christians were less inclined to this medium of art than either painting or relief carving. This form of art may have been most closely associated with pagan idolatry and the imperial cult and thus shunned as a form of decorative or funerary art by Christian clients. Nevertheless, a few significant examples of sculpture assumed to have Christian associations are dated between the third and seventh centuries; in particular a number of third- and fourth-century Good Shepherd statuettes.

A series of small sculptures whose provenance is unknown and therefore usually referred to as the 'Cleveland marbles' (because they are now housed in the Cleveland Museum of Art), includes figures of the Good Shepherd as well as four statues of Jonah (Jonah swallowed, cast up again, reclining under the vine, and praying in the *orans* position). Dated to the late third century on stylistic grounds, these pieces are thought to have come from a family tomb in Asia Minor (Kitzinger 1978).

Other rare examples of early Christian sculpture have been found to depict Christ seated, St Peter holding a cross, and a nearly life-sized figure of the theologian and bishop (or anti-bishop), Hippolytus. Although this material evidence might be enough to support the conclusion that Christians tolerated a certain amount of sculpture in the round, additional textual evidence also exists as back up. Eusebius of Caesarea referred to a bronze statue representing Jesus and the woman with the issue of blood that had been set up near the gates of her alleged home in Caesarea

Philippi as well as bronze images of Daniel and the Good Shepherd which decorated fountains in Constantinople (*Ecclesiastical History* 7:18; *Life of Constantine* 3:49). The *Liber Pontificalis* similarly describes statuary, in this case given by Constantine to adorn the baptistry of the Lateran Basilica: seven silver stags, a golden lamb, and nearly life-sized figures of Christ and John the Baptist (*Book of the Popes* 34:9 and 13 [Sylvester]). Although none of these figures have been found, these texts give testimony to the inclination to identify particular pilgrimage sites or to beautify church settings with statues – an inclination consistent with Roman tradition and decor.

MOSAICS AND IVORY CARVING

Even as the iconographic themes evolved and the settings of Christian art changed, many traditional motifs and popular themes were retained. Thus the end of catacomb painting in the fourth century did not put an end to narrative iconography in general, but only to certain themes that seem to have belonged to an earlier era. Christian art still continued to employ scripture-based imagery, even as both new and old biblical images appeared on the walls of church buildings, on small ivory diptychs or gospel covers, or in early illuminated manuscripts. For example, the early fifth-century mosaic panels along the nave of the basilica of Sta Maria Maggiore (c. 432–40), and those from a century later in the upper nave of S. Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna (c. 493–525), continue to present certain familiar and now ‘ancient’ biblical motifs along with new and heretofore unknown ones. The basilica at Sta Maria Maggiore was adorned with an impressive cycle of Old Testament images in mosaic, especially with scenes from the books of Exodus and Joshua. Among the 27 (of an original 42) surviving images are scenes from Moses’ life, including Moses with the Pharaoh’s daughter, Moses’ marriage to Zipporah, and the battle with the Amalekites. The basilica of S. Apollinare Nuovo, on the other hand, shows new images from the New Testament such as Christ separating the sheep from the goats or Jesus calling Peter and Andrew to be ‘fishers of men’.

Ivory plaques, book covers, boxes designed to hold consecrated bread and reliquary caskets also contain small narrative images, many of which were common in catacomb or sarcophagus iconography. Although most Christian ivory carving is dated from the fifth century, the craft was well established in Rome from the second century and used for luxurious items of every kind from beds to combs. Small hinged ivory tablets known as diptychs were used in the Christian liturgy to hold lists of names of saints, bishops, or important church dignitaries. The ivory plaques of these diptychs, as well as other ivory objects, including gospel covers and even a bishop’s chair, were decorated with carved images of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints, and with episodes from the lives, or with narrative scenes from biblical stories (Figure 28.8).

Ivory carving was used for small pieces and had a kind of intimacy not intended for public view. By contrast, from the fourth to the sixth centuries, mosaic decoration of churches became one of the most important and beautiful modes of Christian artistic expression on a large scale. As with ivory carving, mosaic decoration did



Figure 28.8 Mid-fifth-century ivory diptych (the Andrew diptych) with miracles of Christ. Photo by Art Resource, New York, with the permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

not originate with Christian art. The use of decorative mosaics for both walls and floors was widespread in the ancient Mediterranean world and workshops of skilled artisans merely needed to adapt well-practised techniques to a new programme of images. A few wall and floor mosaics with Christian themes or from Christian contexts are known to date from the pre-Constantinian or very early Constantinian era, and have been discovered in church buildings as well as in funerary contexts.

One of the best known of the latter is the mosaic found in the so-called 'tomb of the Julii' (or mausoleum M), under St Peter's basilica in Rome, which has been roughly dated to the end of the third or beginning of the fourth century. The most famous image (and only truly extant mosaic) from this tomb was placed on the ceiling and presents Christ in the guise of the sun-god (Sol Invictus), complete with radiate halo and riding in a chariot drawn by four white horses. Such an image, clearly a conflation of a pagan image with the Christian saviour, certainly was intended to illustrate an aspect of Christ's divinity (the light of the world or the 'sun of righteousness' of Malachi 4) or to signal Christ's superseding the pagan gods.¹² All around him in this image are grapevines, which were a common decorative motif in Roman art and found their way into Christian iconography, perhaps to pictorially represent the text of John, 'I am the true vine' (John 15:1).¹³

Another example of early mosaic decoration exists in the double church in Aquileia, Italy. The newer church should be dated to the early fourth century and may barely pre-date Constantine. The older (north) church building may be dated some decades earlier, and either incorporated the mosaic pavements of an earlier structure, or was built and originally decorated to serve a Christian community. Both floors are covered with mosaic decoration, and while the mosaic motifs in the older building are ambiguous and show various images of birds and animals, the floor of the newer edifice is clearly Christian in its symbolism, judging by its several scenes from the Jonah story as well as a representation of the Good Shepherd (Menis 1965).

Mosaics were used to decorate both ceilings and floors of Christian churches in the fourth century, all across the Roman empire, from Britain to North Africa and from Spain to Syria. Archaeologists discovered an unusual Christ portrait on a floor mosaic in a late fourth-century Christian building in Dorset at Hinton St Mary and subsequently removed to the British Museum. The portrait, a bust in the centre of a medallion decorated with patterned bands, shows Christ as a beardless Roman youth, dressed in a toga. A chi-rho monogram is placed behind his head and on either side are pomegranates, the significance of which are somewhat mysterious. The placement of a portrait of Christ on the floor of a Christian building is both surprising and unique. In Roman Africa and Numidia (modern Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria), mosaics carpeted the floors of basilicas, covering the tombs of the 'special dead' (martyrs, clergy, or wealthy patrons).

Mosaics began decorating the vaulted ceilings and apses of Christian churches in the mid-fourth century, in conjunction with the Constantinian building programme. One of the earliest examples, the mosaics decorating the round mausoleum of Constantine's daughter, Constantina (now known as the church of Sta Costanza), clearly shows an adaptation of traditional Roman motifs – twining grapevines and harvesting cupids, bird, flowers, and portrait busts of Constantina and her husband. In contrast with these religiously neutral images, however, are the two apse mosaics in the ambulatory that show images of Christ with his apostles, Peter and Paul. These two mosaic portraits present two strikingly different presentations of Christ. In one, Jesus is represented as youthful and fair (beardless and with light hair and eyes), with a mild expression. In the other apse mosaic, an older, bearded and darker-skinned Christ is seated on the orb of the world as if on a throne and his expression is solemn and regal. These latter two mosaics may post-date the floral and

harvesting motifs by twenty years or more, and show the transition from a generic Roman decor to a more specific Christian iconographic programme (Stern 1958). The different images may have been an intentional modelling after portraits of Dionysus (or Apollo) and Jupiter, expressing the triumph of the Christian god over those pagan deities by subsuming the characteristics of both.

Although the churches of Sta Maria Maggiore and S. Apollinare Nuovo continue to show biblical narrative images in their nave mosaic panels, the medium of mosaic was applied most effectively to the apse and dome mosaics that generally emphasized the theological or dogmatic images of Christ transfigured, resurrected, or giving the Law. Typical of these are the early fifth-century apse of Sta Pudenziana, which shows Christ ruling from the Heavenly Jerusalem (Figure 28.7), or SS Cosmas and Damian, which presents Christ standing in a darkened sky, wearing a golden tunic, surrounded by apostles and saints holding out their martyrs' crowns to their Lord.

The presentation of crowns is repeated in several places in Ravenna (the western capital of the Byzantine empire in the fifth and sixth centuries), in the church of S. Apollinare Nuovo, and in the famous mosaic-covered domes of the two baptisteries in that city – the baptistery of the Orthodox and the baptistery of the Arians. Apostles or martyrs marching in a row and carrying jewelled wreaths as an offering either to the child Jesus seated on his mother's lap or to the adult being baptized in the waters of the Jordan present a solemn, hieratic, and suggestively liturgical procession (Figure 28.9). These scenes seem to have connections to particular courtly rituals in which the lesser nobility pay homage to their newly crowned king. Some decades later, the designers of the mosaic decoration for Ravenna's jewel-like church of S. Vitale chose to present two actual courtly processions – one of the emperor Justinian and his courtiers with the bishop, and the other of the empress, Theodora, with her ladies in waiting. Instead of crowns of martyrdom, however, Justinian carries the loaf of Eucharistic bread in an offertory procession while his wife carries the chalice.

The focal point of the chancel (or presbyterium) in S. Vitale is the altar where the bishop would have presided over the Eucharistic sacrifice. Above the altar the viewer sees a dominating image of Christ enthroned on the orb of the world, and below and on the side walls of the apse are the offertory processions of Justinian and Theodora. Directly above the altar itself, on either side, is a different kind of liturgical commentary in mosaic – representations of ancient prototypes of the Eucharistic offering or sacrifice. On one side Melchizedek (drawing on the text in Hebrews 7) and Abel present their offerings, standing on either side of a cloth-draped table that must have looked strikingly similar to the draped altar below. Directly across the chancel and at the same level of vision are two scenes of Abraham combined into one composition, the first showing Abraham serving his three visitors (probably intended to represent the Trinity), and the second showing Abraham about to slay his son Isaac as sacrifice. The imagery and the liturgy here are in perfect harmony – the first non-verbally reflecting and interpreting the language, actions and symbols of the second.



Figure 28.9 Medallion from the mid fifth-century dome mosaic, Orthodox baptistery, Ravenna. Photo Robin Jensen.

MANUSCRIPT ILLUMINATION

In contrast to the monumental character of the mosaics installed in the great churches of the empire, manuscript illuminations were small images preserved and cherished in the codices of the scriptures or gospel books, which were kept on the *ambo* or altar, or in church treasuries when they weren't in use. Beginning in the second century, the parchment codex (a bound book with separate leaves) replaced the scroll as the primary form of the book, particularly for Christians (Jews continued to use scrolls), and very gradually these codices began to be illuminated with miniature paintings. Some of these manuscripts are illustrated with full-page images, while others combine text with illuminations. The paint used for this work was egg tempera, often accented by silver or gold inks, sometimes on purple-stained parchment, underscoring the great value of the book itself.

The oldest known Christian manuscript was discovered at the monastery of Quedlingburg. The *Quedlingburg Itala* (so named for its place of discovery and because it contained a portion of the Old Latin Bible), dates to the early fifth century and consists of five leaves from the books of Samuel and Kings. Historians have assumed this work was produced in a Roman scriptorium that also served pagan clients because of its compositional similarities to a contemporary illuminated manuscript of the *Aeneid* (the *Vergilius Vaticanus*). Such cooperation and adaptation demonstrate the continued adaptation of Christian themes by artisans who were the inheritors of an already established tradition and well-honed craft.

The direct proximity of text and image, however, encouraged the continuing development of narrative art, particularly in sequenced cycles that represent the details of the text fairly literally. The abbreviated, sketchy, and symbolic images of the earlier catacomb frescoes are supplanted here by intent to illustrate the story directly. The four illustrated leaves of the *Quedlinburg Itala* show four scenes on three of its pages and two on another, each representing a relatively small detail of a story in the accompanying columns of text. Calculating that some of these manuscripts had fifty or sixty pages, the volume of artistic work must have been substantial and quite impressive in its richness and detail (Levin 1985; Weitzmann 1977).

Surviving illuminated manuscripts from the sixth century include codices with fragments of the Pentateuch, particularly the book of Genesis (the *Cotton Genesis* and the *Vienna Genesis*) as well as portions of the gospels (the *Gospel of Augustine*, the *Rossano Gospels*, and the *Rabbula Codex*). These manuscripts originated in all parts of the empire, including Egypt and Syria, and Constantinople. The *Vienna Genesis*, perhaps the most beautiful and most complete of these early manuscripts (having 48 existing leaves), was executed in the early sixth century on purple parchment, suggesting that it was made for a member of the imperial family. One of the most impressive of the miniatures in this codex is the presentation of the flood, which differs in almost every possible way from the image of Noah in his ark found in catacomb painting or sarcophagus carving. Here the ark, shown as a boat with a double-decker cabin, barely floats in a dark blue swirling sea in which people and animals are struggling but drowning. Another remarkable miniature from the *Vienna Genesis* is that of Rebecca and Eliezer at the well, from Genesis 24 (see Figure 28.10).

The *Rossano Gospels* (named for the Italian city which still houses the book) is made up of excerpts from the gospels of Matthew and Mark. It illustrates a series of episodes in the life of Christ, including several healings, the raising of Lazarus and Christ's arrest and trial before Pilate. The image of Christ raising Lazarus is filled with narrative detail, even showing the onlookers holding their noses for fear of the stench coming from the tomb. The trial scene of Jesus before Pilate is shown in two parts – Christ first appearing before Pilate, and Pilate asking the people to choose between Barabbas and Jesus. The background of these scenes presents what was probably a typical sixth-century court interior, populated with officials, scribes and Roman guards.

The *Rabbula Codex* is extremely important in the history of Christian art, if for no other reason than that it contains one of the earliest extant images of the crucifixion. Originating in Mesopotamia, but probably based on iconographic models in Palestine, the cycle of images suggests a visit of pilgrims to the sacred shrines of the Holy Land, and certain topographical details – particularly in the representation of the crucifixion itself – not only lend a concrete literalism to the image but suggest that the creators of the prototype had a familiarity with that particular landscape. Like the mosaic processions and offerings in the churches of Ravenna, which represented or commented upon actual liturgical events, here art works draw upon what was known about actual spaces and geography to conflate image with reality and history with sacred narrative.

Christians also produced an entire range of smaller objects, both personal and

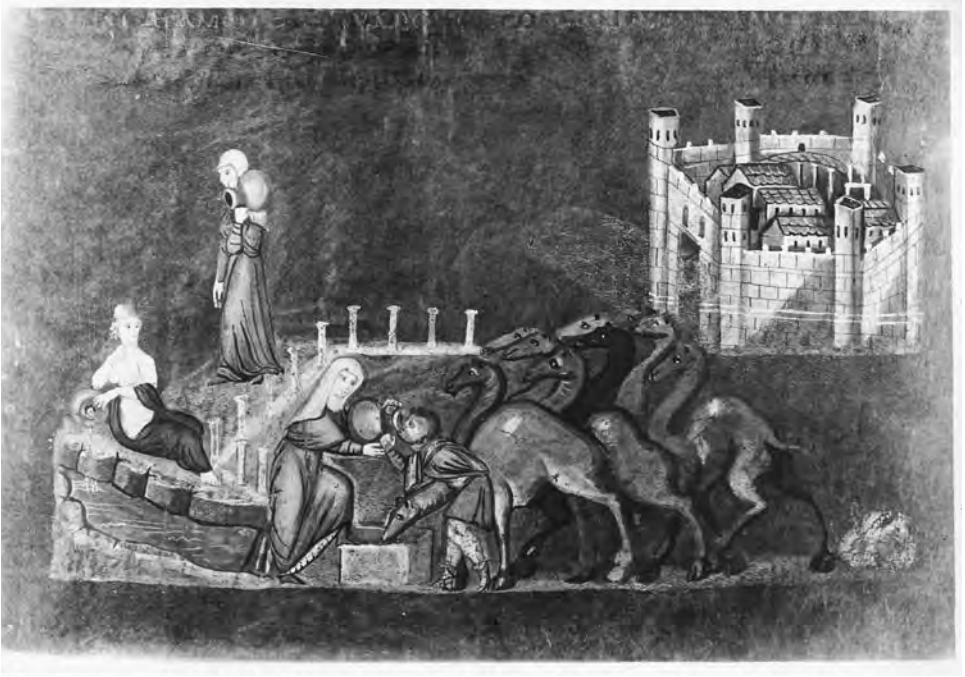


Figure 28.10 Rebecca and Eliezer at the well, from the Vienna Genesis. Photo by Giraudon/ Art Resource, New York, with the permission of Oesterreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.

private in character or communal and liturgical. Jewellery (cameos and signet rings), furniture, domestic ware (silver spoons or caskets, pottery lamps, bowls, or glass bowls and cups), as well as liturgical implements, including reliquaries, incense burners, lamps, chalices, flagons, and patens, constitute a large corpus of important objects for historians of Christian art. Pilgrimage tokens and reliquaries made of pottery, lead, enamelled metal or wood were painted or stamped with images of events corresponding to particular sites in the Holy Land. Even coins, bearing Christian legends or details of reverse imagery are a record of the way faith was made visual in daily life. Whether part of a church's treasury or primarily designed for personal and private use, these goods often are hardly distinguishable from common, everyday items, and their function or Christian character may be identified only by their physical context or small design details. What might be an ordinary drinking cup may be used for a chalice, a serving plate for a paten.

Depending on their base material, some of these items have survived better than others. Metal and glass remains endure better than textiles or wooden objects. Most of the textiles were garments, altar cloths, or curtains and made of linen or wool which bore Christian symbols or occasionally more elaborate Christian imagery, including images of the Virgin and the saints. The best of these textiles come from Egypt, where the arid climate helped to preserve them.

CONCLUSION

Although Christian theologians at various times worried about the problem of idolatry and may have tried to enforce restrictions on Christian use of artistic imagery, in practical application Christians were making and using art, probably even from the first generations, although those images have not survived or been identified as definitively Christian. But, taking care not to fall into idolatry, Christians used visual images as identity with community, to enhance their worship, to inspire or educate, to aid devotion, or even to give honour to God and the saints. Not to be confused with those who actually worshipped cult statues or mistook them for living (and circumscribed) realities, Christians might respect, or even give homage to, a symbol or image without mistaking the mundane elements of wood, paint, or stone for the divine presence itself. Thus what might at first appear as a difference between 'official' theological stance and popular practice, may be more properly a careful definition of form and function.

Several characteristics of Christian art emerge and appear to be foundational. The first is its narrative source. Most early Christian art was related (either directly or indirectly) to sacred narrative – either the Old Testament or the Christian gospels. In the earliest days, these texts were, however, more illuminated than illustrated. The art works were shorthand references to familiar stories already interpreted and given secondary significance in the life of the community, its liturgy, its faith, and its present circumstances. Certain stories were more popular for representation, were particular favourites, and were represented in a kind of modified shorthand form in order to attract the viewer's attention. The rest existed in memory. Only later, when the illuminations were absolutely juxtaposed with text did the images become more faithfully narrative, but even these were interpretations of the key points and meanings contained in the accompanying texts.

The second key point about Christian art is its transmitting tradition, whether through instruction, or through the creation of sacred image and space and the formation of a kind of visual spirituality. Christian art was the work of the community, perhaps patronized by the wealthy, the aristocracy, or even the imperial family, but even so, open to all eyes and on display. To this end, Christian art had to be revolutionary with respect to its surrounding culture – to forge new identity and to draw community around a group of core images or symbols that were its own, even if drawn from earlier traditions or prototypes. As the community grew and changed, so did the art that reflected the church and its people. As the content of theology changed, so did the art advance the concerns of the church, reflected in liturgy and life. When the imagery didn't directly reflect the written sacred texts, it was likely associated with the liturgy or sacraments of the church.

The last characteristic of Christian art is that it functioned symbolically and socially. No matter how fundamentally textual in origins, art did more than merely illustrate or reinforce community, it encompassed and reflected the content and meaning of the faith, in ways beyond mere words. The art interpreted and reinforced the meaning and key symbols of the Christian faith and the hopes of those who were members of the community. Like any set of communal symbols, the images from art were most clear to the insiders, but they communicated as well to outsiders,

identifying members and providing a visual summary of their core ideology. Whether simple and sketchy, or majestic and monumental, the art of the early church perhaps expressed the hopes and expectations of those who belonged to the community better than words alone could do. For them, the materials and contents of art needed no corresponding interpretation. Over time, those symbols evolved, primarily because the community changed, grew, or understood itself in new terms. Different aspects of the faith would come to the fore and find their expression in visual form. Each of these developments was keyed to changing theological emphases as well as shifts in the social, cultural, and political circumstances of the church, and each shift would be mirrored in other aspects of Christian life, such as liturgy, theological writings, and institutional structures.

NOTES

- 1 For example, see the standard argument in Chadwick (1967: 277–8), and by such prominent art historians as Kitzinger (1977: 3). For a very helpful summary of the modern scholarship Finney (1994: 7–12). See also Finney (1994: 99–145) for his critique of other arguments for early Christian aniconism, including a presumption that the earliest Christians were more ‘spiritual’ or ‘otherworldly’ than their pagan neighbours and later Christian art-users.
- 2 Murray (1977) summarizes the early patristic sources on this subject, as well as their use in the later iconoclastic controversy. Most of these ancient texts have appeared in collections, including that of Koch (1917).
- 3 Both Tertullian (*On Modesty* 7.1–4; 10.12) and Clement of Alexandria (*The Tutor* 3.11.59) give second-century testimonia to Christian use of etched Eucharistic cups and engraved signet rings.
- 4 The lack of material wealth as a reason for the lateness of Christian artwork was suggested by Finney (1994: 108).
- 5 These sarcophagi are well-presented and discussed by Benoit (1954).
- 6 Finney summarizes the ideological aspects of scholarly assertions that Rome was the source and centre for Christian artistic output (1994: 151 and 264, nn. 8, 9). For an example of how scholars take Roman dominance for granted see Snyder (1985: 3).
- 7 For a chart of these images and a short discussion of each, see Snyder (1985).
- 8 For discussion and elaboration of these arguments see Goodenough (1962), Weitzmann (1971) and Weitzmann and Kessler (1990).
- 9 Abraham offering Isaac, Moses striking the rock, Daniel and the lions, Jesus before Pilate, Jesus raising Lazarus, and Jesus healing the man born blind.
- 10 See Grabar (1968: 39–50), for a clear statement of what he calls the ‘imperial invention’.
- 11 The strongest case (and probably the first significant argument) for this is in Mathews (1993). For a short summary of some of the arguments see Jensen (1997).
- 12 To see how this is paralleled in text see Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 9, in which the author directly refers to Christ as ‘the Sun of Righteousness, who drives his chariot over all,’ thereby conflating the prophecy of Malachi with the figure of the sun god.
- 13 For a general survey see Volbach (1946).

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MUSIC



James W. McKinnon

INTRODUCTION

The earliest preserved monuments of Christian music date from the Middle Ages. There are a handful of ninth-century manuscripts from Carolingian centres such as Corbie and Compiègne that provide the texts (but not the music) of the Mass Proper chants for the entire liturgical year.¹ These are followed around CE 900 by books from locations such as St Gall, Laon and Chartres that have the same texts with a primitive type of musical notation.²

Figure 29.1 shows the beginning of the Mass chants for the second Sunday of Advent from St Gall 359, perhaps the earliest of all extant notated chant manuscripts. It is an example of a *cantatorium*; that is, a book reserved to the solo cantors – hence the introit *Populus sion*, a choral chant, is given only with its incipit, whereas the gradual *Ex sion*, a solo chant, is provided in its entirety.

Nothing of the sort exists from the early Christian period; we have, instead, only literary references to music. It is true that one third-century musical fragment has come down to us by a freak of preservation, the so-called ‘Oxyrhynchus Hymn’, the much-mutilated closing portion of a Trinitarian hymn from Egypt (Figure 29.2).

The Greek text is surmounted by letters that appear to be a kind of musical notation, purportedly decipherable with the aid of Greek theoretical treatises. Precious as this fragment is, it may have served to distort the historiography of early Christian music. We have no indications that the hymn is particularly representative of early Christian song, and by attracting so much attention to itself it may have retarded the task of exploring the vast repository of evidence about early Christian musical practice and attitudes that is available in the writings of the church Fathers.

If this fund of material is studied systematically (that is, by collecting virtually all of it and arranging it regionally and chronologically, rather than citing it selectively as has been the custom in music histories since the eighteenth century), four major themes or subject matter areas emerge.³ Most obvious, perhaps, is the harsh denunciation of pagan musical display, typically focusing on musical instruments. Then there is musical imagery, again, generally involving instruments, especially those mentioned in the Psalms. A category of reference less frequently encountered, but not without considerable significance, is that which treats of the liberal art

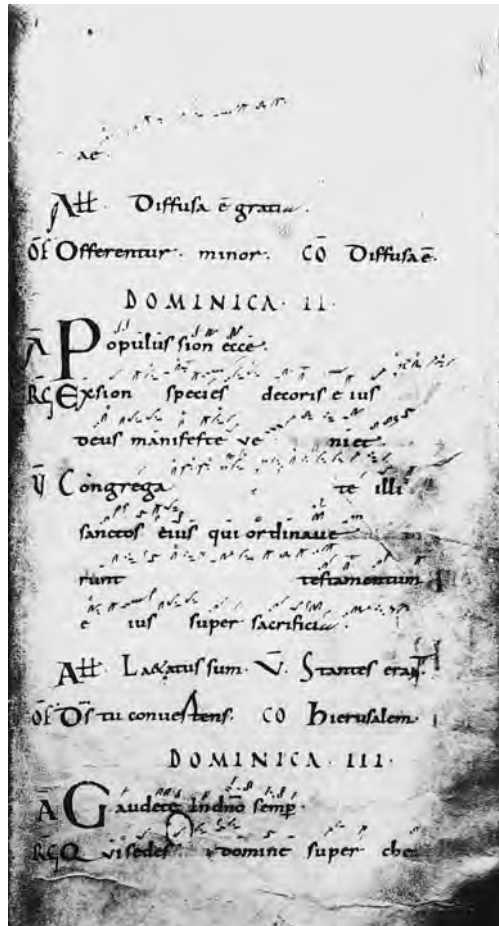


Figure 29.1 The beginning of the Mass chants from the second Sunday of Advent, from the ninth-century manuscript St Gall 359. Copyright Stiftsbibliothek St Gallen, Switzerland.

musica, a subject towards which the church Fathers display an attitude of acceptance seemingly at variance with their condemnation of everyday music in pagan society. Finally there are passages that speak of Christian music itself; that is, the singing of hymns and psalms at Christian gatherings, practices from which the great wealth of medieval ecclesiastical chant will develop. It is this last type of material, surely the most important from a historical point of view, that has proved to be particularly difficult for scholars to control.

THE PATRISTIC POLEMIC AGAINST PAGAN MUSIC

Even the most casual observer will not fail to be struck by the harshness of the patristic utterance against pagan musical practice. John Chrysostom (died 407) calls



Figure 29.2 Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1786, showing a fragmentary closing portion of a Trinitarian hymn from Egypt. Copyright the Committee of the Egypt Exploration Society.

cymbals and *auloi* (pipes or flutes) ‘rubbish of the devil’ (Chrysostom, *In 1 Corinthios*, Hom. 12.5; *MECL* 183), while Arnobius of Sicca (died *c.* 330) asks: ‘Was it for this that he sent souls, that as members of a holy and dignified race they practise here the arts of music and piping . . . that in men they become male prostitutes, and in women harlots, sambucists⁴ and harpists?’ (Arnobius, *Adversus nationes* 2.42; *MECL*).

The kind of musical puritanism involved here is not without its precedents in antiquity. Plato, already, calls for a ban on the *aulos* and on ‘many-stringed instruments’ in his ideal state (*Republic* 399d), while Livy includes ‘women harpists and sambucists’ among the undesirable Eastern luxuries introduced into republican Rome by the Asiatic army of Scipio Africanus (39.6.7). Similarly the prophet Isaiah said of the new urban rich of ancient Judah: ‘They have lyre and harp, tympanum and flute, and wine at their feasts; but they do not regard the deeds of the Lord’ (Isa. 5:12), and centuries later rabbi Johanan commented on the passage: ‘Whoever drinks to the accompaniment of the four musical instruments brings five punishments to the world’ (*Sotah* 48a).

But the patristic reaction against musical abuse is far more intense than anything of the sort encountered in pagan or Jewish antiquity. It is intense and at the same time virtually universal; there is hardly a major early Christian author who did not take part in it. In seeking to explain this, scholars have pointed to the association of various ancient musical practices with pagan religion – for example – the presence of musical instruments at animal sacrifice (see Figure 29.3) or the music of the theatre with its cultic origins.⁵

Tertullian (died *c.* 225) demonstrates his awareness of the latter when he says of the theatre: ‘Whatever transpires in voice, melody, instruments and writing is in the domain of Apollo, the Muses, Minerva and Mercury. O Christians, you will detest those things whose authors you cannot but detest’ (Tertullian, *De spectaculis* 10.8–9; *MECL* 76). But surely just as powerful as such theological motivation is that of moralism. This is clear from the words of Arnobius, quoted above, and from numerous other passages. To quote just one, Pseudo-Basil has this to say of a young prostitute:



Figure 29.3 Sarcophagus relief from Mantua of a Roman general sacrificing a bull, accompanied by music. Copyright Archivi Alinari Florence.

You place a lyre ornamented with gold and ivory upon a high pedestal . . . and some miserable woman, rather than being taught to place her hands upon the spindle, is taught by you . . . to stretch them out upon the lyre . . . So she stands at the lyre and lays her hands upon the strings, her arms bare and her expression impudent . . . All in the house are silent, charmed by the lascivious song.

(Pseudo-Basil, *Commentary on Isaiah* 5.158; MECL 143)

The attitude of the church Fathers is better understood when the various contexts of their condemnations are considered.⁶ Chiefly three social institutions are involved: the wedding, the theatre and the banquet; the three, apparently, were frequently the occasion of musical ribaldry in antiquity. John Chrysostom's reference to musical instruments as the 'rubbish of the devil' came in the course of a diatribe against pagan nuptial celebrations, while the quotation from Tertullian involved the theatre. Isidore of Pelusium (died c. 435) speaks of the banquet when he tells us that 'a carousal . . . is the intoxicating *aulos*, together with prolonged drinking, which arouses one to sensuality, and makes of the symposium a shameful theatre, as it bewitches the guest with cymbals and other instruments of deception' (*Epistle* 1.456; MECL 122).

Some historians have misread this polemic against musical immorality, with its typical singling out of instruments, as evidence for the employment of musical

instruments in Christian church services. Why constantly rail against instruments, they asked, if their intrusion into liturgical chant was not a frequently encountered abuse? The answer, obviously enough, is that the patristic denunciation of instruments involves the sort of circumstances just cited, such as the theatre, banquets, etc., but not church services. We have no patristic passage that can in any way be construed as a condemnation of instruments in church. The issue is an anachronistic reading of nineteenth-century attitudes (when 'worldly' instruments were in fact pitted against the purity of *a cappella* church music) into entirely different early Christian circumstances. It is true that Christian ecclesiastical music has been, throughout much of its earlier history, an exclusively vocal art, but this was a matter of historical circumstances not the result of ecclesiastical edict; it is only in comparatively recent times that we see religious authorities striving to keep liturgical song free from the intrusion of worldly instruments. In the later fourth century, as liturgical services took on the basic shape that they would maintain for centuries, and the singing of psalms was established in set places in these services, the question of instrumental accompaniment simply did not arise. The declamation of psalms was in its origin a form of biblical reading. As it took on a more consciously musical form in the later fourth century (a development treated on p. 778), its essential nature as scriptural cantillation was not forgotten, and we have not a hint from the voluminous fourth-and fifth-century Christian literature that there was any felt need to bring musical instruments into the process.

At the same time we cannot say that musical instruments were absolutely never used in early Christian song. One can well imagine, for instance, particularly in the earlier centuries when evening meals figured more prominently in Christian religious gatherings, that the discreet accompaniment of a lyre might have been fairly common in the hymnody that was heard in the homes of well-to-do Christians.

A final question about instruments: why is it that they are evoked so consistently in the patristic denunciation of pagan music? Lascivious texts, for example, are occasionally mentioned in connection with wedding music, but musical instruments are by far the more consistent target of criticism, whether in the context of weddings, banquet or theatre. The answer lies, I think, in the very special physical properties of musical instruments, both aural and visual. They have a unique capacity, as much by their striking appearance as by their highly individual sonic qualities, to attract attention to themselves. They tend to stand out, then, as the concrete sign of music in all its dimensions. Take, for example, the visual arts, where it is all but impossible to portray music except by the depiction of instruments.

MUSICAL IMAGERY

It comes as no surprise, then, that instruments have a pre-eminent role in early Christian musical imagery. Paul of Tarsus already tells us that the eloquent person without charity has 'become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal' (1 Cor. 13:1), and more positively Ignatius of Antioch (died c. 107), in writing to the Christians of Ephesus, compliments them on their collegiality: 'For your most renowned presby-

tery, worthy of God, is attuned to the bishop as strings to a cithara' (*Ephesians* 4.1–2; *MECL* 21).

The principal source of early Christian musical imagery is the rich fund of instrumental allusion in the Book of Psalms, as treated by the allegorical manner of exegesis employed in the typical patristic psalm commentary.⁷ The practice of psalmic instrumental allegorization has its origins with the third-century Alexandrians Clement (died *c.* 215) and Origen (died *c.* 265), and becomes all but universally employed by patristic commentators of the fourth century. Clement cites the instruments of Psalm 150 in order, applying to each of them an appropriate allegorical interpretation:

The Spirit . . . sings: 'Praise him with the sound of the trumpet', and indeed he will raise the dead with the sound of the trumpet. 'Praise him on the cithara', let the cithara be taken to mean the mouth, played by the Spirit as if by a plectrum. 'Praise him with tympanum and chorus' refers to the Church meditating on the resurrection of the flesh in the resounding membrane . . . 'Praise him on the clangorous cymbals' speaks of the tongue as the cymbal of the mouth which sounds as the lips are moved.

(Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 2.4; *MECL* 52)

As the practice of allegorical exegesis becomes customary in the later fourth-century psalm commentaries, the figures employed for the individual instruments become standardized; indeed, trite and repetitious. Some of them have a measure of poetic aptness such as the 'evangelical trumpet'; that is, the trumpet as a symbol for proclaiming the good news of the gospel. But others seem contrived – for example, the tympanum (a small hand drum) as a sign of mortified desire. We might have expected some imaginative evocation of a percussion instrument's elemental thumping, but instead the figure has to do with the stretching of an animal's skin on the circular frame of the drum, and hence the death of the flesh.

The allegorical mode of Psalter exegesis, with its consistent employment of instrumental imagery, has created a measure of confusion among certain historians. These individuals, insufficiently mindful that the authors of the psalm commentaries are engaged in the exegesis of an Old Testament book rather than discoursing on contemporary musical life, allow themselves to see in the equanimity of the patristic instrumental reference an implicit approval of instruments and a contradiction of the polemic described above. A corrective to this confusion is provided by the fourth- and fifth-century exegetes of the Antioch school, figures such as John Chrysostom and Theodoret of Cyrus (died *c.* 466). These authors eschew the typical Alexandrian allegorical method in favour of a more literal or historical approach. Hence in speaking of the instruments of the Psalter, they seek to explain them in their historical context. Thus Theodoret has the following to say about the instruments of Psalm 150, in a passage not altogether lacking in the anti-Semitism for which the Antiochenes have been frequently reproached:

'Praise him on psaltery and cithara. Praise him with tympanum and dance. Praise him on strings and instrument. Praise him on well-sounding cymbals, praise him on loud-clashing cymbals' (Ps. 150:4–5). The Levites employed

these instruments long ago as they hymned God in his holy Temple, not because God enjoyed their sound but because he accepted the intention of those involved. That the Deity does not take pleasure in singing and playing we hear him saying to the Jews: 'Take away from me the sound of your songs; to the voice of your instruments I will not listen' (Amos 5:23). He allowed these things to happen because he wished to free them from the error of idols. For since they were fond of play and laughter, and all these things took place in the temples of the idols, he permitted them and thereby enticed them, thus avoiding the greater evil by allowing the lesser.

Interpretatio in Psalmos 150; MECL 229)

But it is the allegorical approach which is dominant in early Christian literature and which remains a staple of medieval psalm commentaries. There is a fascinating parallel to patristic musical imagery encountered in the manuscript illumination of the Middle Ages, even if it is more characteristic of psalters themselves than of psalm commentaries. Artists, for reasons already suggested, love to draw and paint musical instruments. They take full advantage, then, of the instruments mentioned in the Psalms as well as those mentioned in a frequently encountered psalter preface that is attributed to Venerable Bede, but is clearly derived from the introduction to the psalm commentary of Eusebius of Caesarea (died *c.* 340).⁸ In the later Middle Ages these psalmic instrumental depictions spread by a kind of contagion from the psalters themselves to all manner of illuminated manuscripts, where they decorate the margins in riotous profusion. There they form a visual analogue to the musical imagery of the early Christian psalm commentary.

THE LIBERAL ART OF MUSIC

Musica is one of the seven liberal arts; it finds place amid the four mathematical arts of the quadrivium (*arithmetica*, *geometrica*, *musica* and *astronomia*), which follow the three propaedeutical language arts of the trivium (*grammatica*, *rhētorica* and *dialectica*). It took about a millennium, from the time of Plato to that of Martianus Cappella (fifth century), for the system to become fixed in the form just described, but *musica* was an established subject virtually from the beginning. It had little to do with the modern notion of what constitutes music, and it would be a mistake even to identify it with the contemporary subject of music theory. Our music theory strives honestly, if not always successfully, to explain the workings of actual music, but the *musica* of antiquity focused upon itself; it had nothing to do with the everyday music of its time and concentrated instead on the construction of abstract tonal systems (scales), which utilized the full repertory of ancient mathematical learning. It was at the same time a subject of some grandeur, because these tonal systems were thought not only to reside on the pages of treatises but to echo throughout the cosmos. The 'music of the spheres' was just that — the seven planets, each revolving at a precisely determined rate so as to create its own pitch, with the seven together created an all encompassing scale, a phenomenon that had achieved its classic exposition already in the *Timaeus* of Plato. It is no accident that the

greatest of the ancient music theorists was the renowned astronomer Ptolemy, who, for all we know, could have been tone deaf.

Music, as an abstract science, posed none of the problems for early Christians that the pagan music of everyday existence did. To the extent, then, that Christians accepted the educational system of antiquity as a whole, they would accept *musica* as a matter of course. Origen, for example, cites 'music' as one of the subjects propaedeutic to Greek philosophy, which, in turn, can be propaedeutic to Christianity:

I would wish that you take from Greek philosophy that which has the capacity, as it were, to become encyclical and propaedeutic studies for Christianity, and whatever of geometry and astronomy might be useful in the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, so that just as the children of the philosophers speak of geometry and music, grammar, rhetoric and astronomy as being ancillary to philosophy, we too may say this of philosophy itself in relation to Christianity.

(*Letter to Gregory* 1; MECL 63)

Origen mentions here that Greek learning can be useful in the interpretation of Scripture, and this is the more particular role that early Christian savants assign to *musica* and the other sciences. Still more particularly, a Christian scholar might look upon his allegorical exposition of the instruments of the Psalter as an application of the discipline *musica*. Augustine demonstrates this in his *De doctrina christiana*:

Indeed, an ignorance of certain musical questions shuts off and conceals much. For on the basis of a distinction between psaltery and cithara a certain writer has aptly explained some figures of things, and among the learned it is fittingly queried whether the psaltery of ten strings obeys some law of music which required that number of strings, or whether . . . that number should be considered to result from . . . the Ten Commandments.

(*De doctrina christiana* 2.16.26; MECL 381)

Augustine closed his disquisition on the application of *musica* to scriptural exegesis with a clear distinction between this use of music and the 'theatrical frivolities' of actual instruments:

We must nevertheless not shun music because of the superstition of the heathen, if we are able to snatch from it anything useful for the understanding of the Holy Scriptures. Nor should we be involved with their theatrical frivolities, if we consider some point concerning citharas and other instruments which might be of aid in comprehending spiritual things.

(*De doctrina christiana* 2.18.28; MECL 383)

Augustine, it should be noted, contemplated at one time the authorship of a series of works on the seven liberal arts. It was never completed, and not all that he did manage to write has come down to us. Surviving are the six books of *De musica*, a treatise on the rhythmic and metric aspects of music, while a planned treatise on the tonal material of music, the subject favoured by Ptolemy and most other ancient theorists, was never begun. The sixth book of Augustine's *De musica* was written just

after his conversion, and in it he soars to unprecedented heights to create a Christianized, albeit neo-Platonic, philosophy of rhythm, which has influenced aesthetic thinking down to modern times.

Augustine's *De musica* aside, the early Christian adaptation of classical music theory may strike us as trivial and perfunctory, but it had enormous unintended consequences for the history of western music. Christian authors of succeeding centuries, figures such as Boethius, Cassiodorus, and Isidore of Seville, maintained the early Christian stance towards the liberal art of music and compiled their own digests of classical music theory. These works maintained the classical abstract manner of extreme isolation from contemporary musical reality, although this was to change in the Middle Ages. Carolingian scholars took the basic concepts and terminology of these transitional authors, especially Boethius, and made direct application of them to the Gregorian chant of their own time (we noted on p. 773 the ninth-century 'invention' of music notation). The result was a powerful theoretical thrust in western music, a horizontal rationalization, so to speak, creating rhythmic systems, and a vertical rationalization creating harmonic systems. This sent western music on its course of constructing monumental architectonic forms, distinguishing it from the music of other high cultures, which maintained more fluid, improvisational approaches to musical creation.

EARLY CHRISTIAN HYMNODY AND PSALMODY

If the early Christian acceptance of classical music theory eventually influenced the direction taken by European art music, then early Christian ecclesiastical song itself played an even more central role in that development. The hymnody and psalmody of the ancient church developed into the Gregorian chant of the early Middle Ages which, in turn, developed into the great polyphonic art of the High Middle Ages and Renaissance.

Christian song in the earliest centuries

Christianity was warmly receptive to religious song from the beginning. There are several New Testament references to the singing of hymns and psalms, the most significant of which, perhaps, has Jesus and his disciples singing a 'hymn' at the close of the Last Supper (Matt. 26:30 and Mark 14:26). If the Last Supper took place on the evening of the Passover, as the synoptic gospels indicate, then this hymn was the Hallel (Pss. 113–18),⁹ which was traditionally sung by Jewish families on this occasion.¹⁰ That the singing, moreover, took place at an evening meal has a significance of its own. The majority of references to Christian song from the first three centuries are to singing at common meals, whether the meal be part of an *agape* service (love feast), or some less formal occasion. The latter seems to be the case in the following affecting passage from Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (martyred in 258), where he asks a musical friend to sing a 'psalm' (the term is used interchangeably with 'hymn' in the first Christian centuries) at his table:

And since this is a restful holiday and a time of leisure, now as the sun is sinking towards evening, let us spend what remains of the day in gladness and not allow the hour of repast to go untouched by heavenly grace. Let a psalm be heard at the sober banquet, and since your memory is sure and your voice pleasant, undertake this task as is your custom. You will better nurture your friends, if you provide a spiritual recital for us and beguile our ears with sweet religious strains.

(Cyprian, *Ad Donatum* 16; *MECL* 94)

The conventional wisdom has it that in these earliest centuries newly composed hymns were more commonly sung than psalms from the Psalter. Indeed one school of thought sees the New Testament text shot through with fragments of early Christian hymns. This view has met with considerable scepticism in the most recent years,¹¹ and many of the passages in question are now taken to be simply instances of rhetorical prose rather than hymn texts, but the more basic notion that hymns predominate over psalms in very early Christian song remains in favour.¹² A corollary to this view is that the singing of biblical psalms became common only in the fourth century, and that at the same time, as the concept of a scriptural canon was more firmly established, the singing of individually composed hymns (*psalmi diotici*) came to be frowned upon. There is no doubt a good deal of truth in all this, but one must take care not to oversimplify. I find it hard to imagine that favourite biblical psalms, or portions thereof, were not sung with some frequency in early Christian gatherings from the beginning. It may be true, as advocates of the position in question maintain, that the Old Testament Psalter was at first looked upon primarily as a book of readings rather than a hymnary. But the lyric character of the Psalms is undeniable; many of them were singled out for musical performance in the Temple of Jerusalem, and it seems inevitable that something of the sort must have taken place in primitive Christianity as well.

The venue, however, where psalmody appears *not* to have been a regular practice in the earliest centuries is the Eucharist, that is, the Eucharist once it had been divorced from the evening meal and moved to a morning celebration.¹³ Justin Martyr (died c. 165) provides us with our most detailed description of this service, and he makes no mention of psalmody during the pre-Eucharistic service of readings and instruction (hereafter 'synaxis'), the place where we might expect it to be included:

And on the day named for the sun there is an assembly in one place for all who live in the towns and in the country; and the memoirs of the Apostles and the writings of the Prophets are read as long as time permits. Then, when the reader has finished, he who presides speaks, giving admonishment and exhortation to imitate those noble deeds. Then we all stand together and offer prayers.

(*1 Apology* 1.67; *MECL* 25)

Justin mentions three distinct elements – reading, exhortation (homily), and prayer – whereas it was maintained until recently by historians of liturgy and music alike that there were four essential elements: reading, psalmody, exhortation and prayer. Essential to this view is the proposition that the pre-Eucharistic synaxis was

taken over *en bloc* from the synagogue service, which itself consisted in the four essential elements of reading, psalmody, exhortation, and prayer. During the past decade or so, however, scholars (liturgical and musical, Christian and Jewish) have substantially revised the earlier view of ancient synagogue liturgy.¹⁴ Certainly the reading and exposition of scripture were common practices in the synagogues of Jesus' time, and no doubt prayer of some sort was also involved. But it is unlikely that anything like a formal liturgical order was established until some time after the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 CE. As for psalmody, the evidence is overwhelming that it did not become a regular part of the synagogue service until centuries after the Temple's destruction; indeed, the close connection of Temple psalmody with the act of sacrifice, and the stated intention to restore the Temple some day, functioned as an inhibiting factor in the development of synagogue psalmody.

To say that the early Christian pre-Eucharistic synaxis is not a direct borrowing of an ancient synagogue liturgy is not to deny the obvious debt of early Christian liturgy to Judaism in general and to the synagogue in particular. The concept of a weekly day of rest and celebration is part of that debt, along with the provision of an annual cycle of feasts. Even more essential perhaps is the part played in the new religion by a collection of sacred books, read and commented upon at meetings – at meetings, moreover, which are held in the confines of a home or communal hall



Figure 29.4 Relief from the Arch of Titus in Rome, showing musical instruments from the Jerusalem Temple at his triumph in 71 CE. Copyright Archivi Alinari Florence.

rather than an open square before a temple. It is only the notion of a fixed liturgical placement for psalmody in the pre-Eucharistic synaxis, borrowed from an identical synagogue service that must be rejected.

In fact, the early Christian evidence viewed only with reference to itself speaks against the existence of pre-Eucharistic psalmody in the second and third centuries. We know that such psalmody was an essential feature of the service in the later fourth century; how, then, did this come about? The answer to this question must await a description of broader musical and liturgical developments of the fourth century.

Desert monasticism and the fourth-century psalmodic movement

There was a virtual explosion of psalm singing in the later decades of the fourth century, and the chief impetus for this came from an unlikely source – desert monasticism.¹⁵ Led by figures such as the hermit Anthony (died 356) in the north and the coenobite Pachomius (died 346) in the south, thousands of stalwart souls flooded the deserts of Egypt seeking to recover the purity of apostolic Christianity. They sought to put into practice, literally, Paul's admonition 'to pray without ceasing' (1 Thess. 5:17), and the means they employed towards this end was the recitation of the Psalter. This was not a matter of selecting particular psalms for appropriate occasions, but the declamation of the Psalms in continuous order for extended periods of time. Indeed some monks would recite the entire Psalter in a single night.

We must not imagine here anything like the psalmody of, say, eleventh-century Cluny; rather than a splendid choral sacrifice of praise this was the murmured chanting of unschooled individuals, utilizing the Psalms as an aid to meditation. Yet it no doubt had a beauty of its own, inspiring Palladius (died c. 431), for example, to describe what he heard when visiting the great monastery of Nitria:

They all make linen with their hands so that they are all without need. Indeed one who stands there at about the ninth hour can hear the psalmody issuing forth from each cell, so that he imagines himself to be high above in paradise.

(Palladius, *Lausiac History* 7; *MECL* 117)

Palladius was not the only prominent ecclesiastical figure to visit the Egyptian monasteries. Basil, Jerome, Cassian, Rufinus, Paula, and many others made the same pilgrimage, some staying for extended periods of time. Monastic spirituality became the ideal form of Christianity in the later fourth century, and virtually no important ecclesiastical figure failed to spend several years of spiritual apprenticeship as a monk. Ambrose of Milan is perhaps the one significant exception to this, and he, too, fostered monasticism in his diocese. The monastic movement, in any event, spread from the deserts to the cities, and there greatly influenced the Christian way of life.

And the hallmark of monasticism remained psalmody. The two seemed always to be mentioned in the same breath, whether it be Basil the Great (died 379) recommending his monastic retreat to Gregory of Nazianzus: 'What is more blessed than to imitate the chorus of angels here on earth; to arise for prayer at the very break of

day and honour the Creator with hymns and songs' (*Epistle* 2.2; *MECL* 138); or the Pseudo-Chrysostom in that oft-quoted paean to Davidic psalmody:

In the monasteries there is a holy chorus of angelic hosts, and David is first, middle, and last. In the convents there are bands of virgins who imitate Mary, and David is first, middle, and last. In the deserts men crucified to this world hold converse with God, and David is first, middle, and last. And at night all men are dominated by physical sleep and drawn into the depths, and David alone stands by, arousing all the servants of God to angelic vigils, turning earth into heaven and making angels of men.

(*De poenitentia*, PG 64.12–13; *MECL* 195)

Monastic psalmody had two demonstrable influences on Christian life in the second half of the fourth century: it virtually inundated the newly developing Office with continuous psalmody, and it inspired the creation of the popular psalmodic vigil. As for the first of these developments, two daily public offices had developed in the course of the fourth century after the emancipation of Christianity with the Edict of Milan in 313. The two services, one in the morning and another in the evening, constituted the so-called 'cathedral office'. They made carefully selective use of psalms: in the morning, for example, Psalm 62:1 (LXX), 'Oh God my God, I rise before thee at the break of day' was sung, and in the evening Psalm 140 (LXX) with its verse two, 'Let my prayer be directed to thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice.' These psalms formed part of elegantly designed sequences of song and prayer, presided over by the bishop, which varied somewhat from city to city, but which maintained none the less a recognizably homogeneous shape and a common core of material (Taft 1986: 36–56).

In the second half of the century the urban monastic office radically transformed the cathedral office; it did so mostly by addition, leaving the cathedral nucleus more or less intact. The morning cathedral service, the predecessor of early medieval lauds, was preceded by a lengthy vigil of monastic psalmody, the forerunner of matins. During the day three shorter services of monastic psalmody were added, at the third, sixth and ninth hours. Finally, the evening cathedral service, our vespers, was preceded by a prelude of monastic psalmody. The monastic components of the hybrid office were clearly distinct from the cathedral components; they consisted essentially of continuous psalmody, and they were in fact performed by monks and nuns, in the absence, moreover, of the local bishop, who presided only over the original cathedral portions of the Office. Robert Taft (1986: 75–91) has made an impressive effort to reconstruct the offices of the various ecclesiastical centres, making good use of the not always adequate sources; for Jerusalem, however, one can read a complete and detailed description of the late fourth-century office in the diary of the pilgrim nun Egeria.¹⁶

It is Egeria, too, that provides the most telling evidence for the monastic influence on the people's pre-Eucharistic vigil. She describes the early morning vigil that monks and nuns (*monazontes* and *parthenae* in the Jerusalem idiom) perform on six days of the week in the great Constantinian basilica of the Anastasis; it consists of continuous psalmody with interspersed prayers, the prayers being said by local clergy, thus providing a sort of ecclesiastical sanction for the monastic service. Lay

people are in attendance at these weekday gatherings, and then on Sunday morning the monks and nuns are absent, and the laity, assisted by the local clergy, participate in a vigil that is more or less identical to that held during the week by the monks and nuns. Such vigils became common throughout the East and eventually the West in the closing decades of the fourth century. It is such a practice that Augustine refers to when he says of Milan in the year 386: 'At that time the custom began that hymns and psalms be sung after the manner of the Eastern regions lest the people be worn out with the tedium of sorrow. The practice has been retained from that time until today and imitated . . . by almost all your congregations throughout the rest of the world' (*Confessions* 9.6.14–7.15; *MECL* 351).

Related, no doubt, to the phenomenon of the popular psalmic vigil are the extended encomiums of psalmody penned by several outstanding ecclesiastical figures including Athanasius, Basil, John Chrysostom, Ambrose and Niceta of Remesiana. These passages suggest that psalmody had become central to the Christian piety of the time. Ambrose, for example, tells us:

Old men ignore the stiffness of age to sing a psalm . . . young men sing one without the bane of lust . . . young women sing psalms with no loss of wifely decency . . . and the child who refuses to learn other things takes pleasure in contemplating it . . . A psalm is sung by emperors and rejoiced in by the people . . . a psalm is sung at home and repeated outdoors; it is learned without effort and retained with delight.

(*Explanatio psalmi* 1.9; *MECL* 276)

The 'delight' that Ambrose refers to here speaks to the aesthetic dimension of what has taken place in the later fourth-century upwelling of enthusiasm for singing the Psalms. One has the distinct impression that the urban psalmody of the period is generally a much more musical affair than the psalmody of desert monasticism, which had had so much to do with the origins of the fourth-century psalmodic movement. There are numerous references from the time to the way that the pleasurable melody of psalmody aids human nature in its spiritual quest. Niceta of Remesiana (died after 414), for example, argues:

Through David the Lord prepares for men this potion which is sweet by reason of its melody and effective in the cure of disease by reason of its strength. For a psalm is sweet to the ear when sung, it penetrates the soul when it gives pleasure, it is easily remembered when sung often, and what the harshness of the Law cannot force from the minds of man it excludes by the suavity of song.

(*De utilitate hymnorum* 5; *MECL* 306)

Niceta expresses the majority view of the time. There are some, it is true, who are less hospitable to the idea of musical delight; Jerome, for example, on more than one occasion argued that the Christian should sing psalms in such a way 'that not the voice of the singer but the words that are read give pleasure' (*Commentary on Ephesians* 3.5.19; *MECL* 333). Augustine, with characteristic psychological perception, gives us the most nuanced view of this conflict when he tells of his scruples over experiencing pleasure in hearing the psalmody of the church of Milan. He speaks first of his pleasure: 'How much I wept at your hymns and canticles, deeply moved by the

voices of your sweetly singing church', then expresses his guilt over his reaction: 'I sin thus in these things'. But ultimately he accepts melodious psalmody: 'I err by excessive severity . . . When I recall the tears which I shed at the song of the Church in the first days of my recovered faith . . . I acknowledge again the great benefit of this practice' (*Confessions* 10.33.49–50; *MECL* 352).

The psalmody of the later fourth-century Eucharist

The question of how psalmody came to be a regular feature of the morning Eucharist was left open above. Certainly the phenomenon of the later fourth-century psalmodic movement provides at least part of the answer: the near universal enthusiasm for the singing of psalms must have furnished the context for the establishment of Eucharistic psalmody as a formal liturgical event. Psalmody, in any case, came to be employed regularly at two places in the later fourth-century Eucharist: in connection with the readings of the pre-Eucharistic synaxis and during the distribution of communion.

The second of these is less complex from a historiographic point of view. There are several references from the time to the singing during communion of Psalm 33 with its highly appropriate verse eight, 'Taste and see that the Lord is good.' The communion psalm would generally be sung in the responsorial manner; that is, a solo lector or cantor would declaim each verse, and at certain intervals, perhaps after every verse, the congregation would respond by singing the refrain verse, 'Taste and see'. Most of the evidence for singing this particular psalm comes from the East, while the more scanty western evidence suggests a less selective approach to communion psalmody. This state of affairs is corroborated by the situation in the Middle Ages, when the most common Byzantine communion chant is the original *Gensasthe kai idete* ('Taste and see'), whereas the Roman *Gustate et videte* is simply one in a series of undifferentiated post-Pentecost communions.

The psalmody of the later fourth-century pre-Eucharistic service is attested to in numerous patristic passages, well over a hundred of them in the works of Augustine alone.¹⁷ Generally the reference appears in a sermon (or homily) preached by a church Father at Saturday or Sunday morning Eucharist, in which he makes reference to the psalm that had been sung earlier in the service. The fourth-century pre-Eucharistic service was simpler than it would come to be in the Middle Ages. It began with a brief greeting by the celebrant such as 'Peace be to you', and moved immediately to the readings, which were followed by homily and prayers, and then the dismissal of the catechumens. The psalmody was part of the readings; the psalm, in fact, was one of the readings, as is clear from numerous passages such as this from Augustine: 'We heard the Apostle [epistle], we heard the Psalm, we heard the Gospel; all the divine readings sound together so that we place hope not in ourselves but in the Lord' (*Sermo* 165, *de verbis Apostoli, Ephesians* 3.13–18, 1; *MECL* 371).

It might surprise some to learn that this psalm was spoken of as a reading in Augustine's time, and it might lead them to think that it was simply recited rather than sung. But that this particular 'reading' is at the same time a musical event (an instance of the kind of responsorial psalmody described above in connection with the communion) is clear from numerous other passages; for example, this, in

which Augustine reminds his congregation in speaking of Psalm 99 (LXX): 'The psalm which we have just now heard sung and responded to in singing, is short and highly beneficial' (*In psalmum* 119.1; *MECL* 364). At least some of these response verses must have been sung to particularly attractive tunes. In speaking of the first verse of Psalm 132 (LXX), 'Behold how good and sweet it is when brothers dwell in unity', Augustine seems to chide his congregation for their undue focus on its singular charm: 'That sound is so sweet that even those who do not know the Psalter quote this verse . . . this sweet sound, this lovely melody' (*In psalmum* 132.1–2; *MECL* 365).

In this seeming contradiction between the psalm being spoken of at the same time as a biblical reading and as a melodious song, I believe, lies a clue to reconstructing the history of the pre-Eucharistic responsorial psalm. At an earlier stage (the second and third centuries) psalms must have figured occasionally among the Old Testament readings of the pre-Eucharistic service. It is possible that as psalms, their inherent lyric qualities might have been exploited by at least some lectors, and that they might have been declaimed in somewhat more musical fashion than the other readings. Still they were essentially readings, not set musical pieces. But in the late fourth-century wave of enthusiasm for the singing of psalms, it is possible that the pre-Eucharistic psalm moved from an occasional to a regular liturgical event, and while still referred to as a reading, was performed in the responsorial manner that had come into vogue during the psalmodic movement.

Bringing further plausibility to this reconstruction is a consideration of the broader historical background. With the emancipation of the church in 313 came a transformation of Christianity into a more public religion. Domestic gatherings, whether to celebrate the Eucharist or to attend morning and evening prayer, developed into elaborate services in great stone basilicas, calling for a style of declamation and song matching the new acoustical environment.

Still, the Eucharistic psalmody of the later fourth and earlier fifth centuries, and the Office psalmody as well, was just that: psalmody; that is, the solo declamation of psalms (with accompanying congregational responses) by lectors, cantors, monks and nuns, all of whom were essentially amateurs. The ecclesiastical song of the time was not yet the medieval Byzantine or Roman chant, which consisted of elaborate set pieces recorded in liturgical books, sung as part of a complex annual cycle by quasi-professional clerical and monastic choirs. Yet the psalmody of the early Christian period lay in a direct line of development with that splendid musical outcome which is one of the glories of Christian civilization.

NOTES

- 1 The texts are edited in Hesbert (1935).
- 2 Several of the earliest notated manuscripts have been published in facsimile by the monks of St-Pierre de Solesmes in the series *Paléographie musicale*, which commenced in 1889 with the manuscript pictured in Figure 29.1.
- 3 I attempted such a survey in McKinnon (1987a). All patristic quotations in the present chapter will be quoted from that work; after each quotation the abbreviation *MECL* will

follow in parentheses with the *MECL* number (not page) of the item quoted. The complete citation for each quotation, including the place in the patristic author's work and in modern editions, is available in *MECL*.

- 4 A sambuca was a triangular instrument with four strings, of Eastern origin.
- 5 See especially Quasten (1930: 81–3). This classic volume of the eminent patristics scholar serves as the starting point for much of my own work.
- 6 Much of the following two paragraphs is summarized from McKinnon (1965).
- 7 Much of this section on 'musical imagery' is summarized from McKinnon (1968a).
- 8 See *MECL* 205.
- 9 The numbering of the Psalms given here is that of the Hebrew Bible; subsequent numbering in this chapter will be from the Greek-Latin tradition.
- 10 See McKinnon (1987b: 93–5).
- 11 See especially Foley (1992: 58).
- 12 For a finely nuanced summary of the issues involved, see Bradshaw (1982: 43–6).
- 13 See McKinnon (1987b: 95–8).
- 14 See, for example, Smith (1981), McKinnon (1968b), Bradshaw (1992: 21–3) and Smith (1994).
- 15 This entire section is summarized from McKinnon (1994).
- 16 See *MECL* 242–53, selections from the *Itinerarium Egeriae*.
- 17 On the subject of patristic references to the psalmody of the pre-Eucharistic synaxis, see Martimort (1982) and McKinnon (1996b).

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IMAGINATIVE LITERATURE



Richard Bauckham

INTRODUCTION

Most early Christian literature was didactic, devotional or theological. But there is also imaginative literature, some examples of which we shall consider in this chapter. Such works, of course, had religious aims, but aims which were fulfilled by the telling of imaginative stories. Works of the narrative imagination are found especially among some of the so-called apocryphal works produced from the second century onwards. In this connection the term ‘apocryphal’ should not be given much weight. These were not necessarily works which might have been included in the canon of the New Testament but in fact were excluded. Most were never candidates for canonicity. They were not necessarily works condemned as heretical by the emerging orthodoxy of the Catholic church, though some of them were. Many were widely read in thoroughly orthodox circles as edifying and entertaining literature, and some, even when roundly condemned by councils and theologians, were thought too good to lose by scholars and monks who preserved them, and much too interesting to abandon by ordinary readers with whom they remained popular. English translations of the Christian apocryphal works discussed in this chapter can be found in Elliott (1993) and Schneemelcher (1991–2).

We might expect apocryphal gospels to be prominent among works of the Christian narrative imagination, but in fact no non-canonical gospel of the type that narrates the story of Jesus, as the canonical gospels do, survives in more than fragments. Surviving apocryphal gospels (mostly gnostic) are collections of sayings of Jesus or dialogues between the risen Jesus and his disciples, not narratives. For stories of Jesus we must turn to more specialized off-shoots of the Gospel genre: ‘proto-gospels’ and gospels of the Passion and Resurrection. The latter type (including especially the cycle of narratives known either as the *Gospel of Nicodemus* or as the *Acts of Pilate*), though important for its medieval influence, developed only in the later patristic period and will not be studied here. But ‘proto-gospels’ (often called birth and infancy gospels) which narrate Jesus’ background (from before the birth of his mother), birth and childhood began to be written in the second century. We shall comment on the two second-century works of this type from which all later such works developed: the *Protevangelium of James* and the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*.

These works illustrate how the Christian narrative imagination blossomed, especially in the gaps left by the Christian story as the New Testament itself told it. This also happened in the case of stories about the apostles. The canonical Acts of the Apostles, the only canonical narrative about the early church, leaves a great deal untold. Even Paul's story is cut off an indeterminate time before his death. The other most famous apostle, Peter, drops out of the narrative of Acts half way through the book, and not even his later presence in Rome, well known to all later Christians, is mentioned. About the ministries of most of the 12 apostles, all of whom the risen Jesus commissions, at the beginning of Acts, to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, Acts has practically nothing to say. For this reason – and other reasons which will become apparent – apocryphal narratives of the deeds and deaths of individual apostles flourished from the second century onwards. We shall study the five oldest of these apocryphal acts of apostles.

THE *PROTEVANGELIUM* OF JAMES

The *Protevangelium of James* is one of the most attractive of the early Christian apocryphal works, as well as one of the most influential (see Cothenet 1988; Vorster 1988). It tells a delightful story with considerable narrative skill. The title *Protevangelium* is not ancient, but is reasonably apt in that it describes the work as the beginning of the Gospel story. It begins in fact at a chronological starting-point prior even to that of Luke's Gospel, with a story about Mary's parents that leads to her birth, and ends shortly after the birth of Jesus. But the ascription of the work to James is probably original. He is James the brother of Jesus, here understood (as in other Christian literature of the second and third centuries) as one of Joseph's children by his first marriage. Already adult at the time of Jesus' birth, James was an eyewitness of the later parts of the narrative, though only in the conclusion does he reveal his authorship. Pseudonymity presumably supports one purpose of the work, which, as we shall see, is apologetic against derogatory stories of Jesus' birth and background. The *Protevangelium* was written in the second century.

The narrative

Like the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel, the narrative strongly evokes a Palestinian Jewish context, with an emphasis on the Temple in Jerusalem, though, unlike Luke's Gospel, much of the Jewish detail is fanciful rather than historically informed. At the outset of the work, Mary's parents, Joachim and Anna, a wealthy couple resident in Jerusalem, are childless. Their sorrow over this is poignantly described. Joachim retires to the wilderness, apparently with his flocks (*Protevangelium of James* 1.2 and 4.2; see Figure 30.1)

In response to their prayers, an angel informs them that they are to have a child who will become world famous. Like her Old Testament prototype and namesake Hannah, Anna vows to give the child to God, and so at three years old Mary leaves her parents to live in the Temple, where she is miraculously fed by an angel. This



Figure 30.1 Joachim retires to the sheepfold; drawing after Giotto's painting in the Arena chapel in Padua. From Quilter (1880).

part of the story, known as 'the presentation of Mary in the Temple', has inspired numerous artistic renditions (see Figure 30.2).

At 12, approaching puberty, Mary cannot stay in the Temple without defiling it, and so an angel instructs the high priest Zechariah (evidently the Zechariah of Luke 1, the father of John the Baptist) to assemble the widowers of Judaea, so that by a miraculous sign one may be selected to take Mary as his wife. Widowers are specified because it is intended that Mary remain a virgin and her husband be in reality a guardian. The choice goes to Joseph.

At the age of 16, Mary is addressed by an angel, as in Luke's annunciation story, and visits her kinswoman Elizabeth, as in Luke's Gospel. When she returns home, Joseph's reaction to her evident pregnancy and the angelic explanation to him in a dream are expansions of Matthew's account. When Mary's pregnancy becomes known to an outsider, Joseph is accused to the high priest of having defiled the virgin in his care. Both Mary and Joseph protest their innocence, and they are vindicated when the high priest puts them through the ordeal of drinking water that would harm them were they guilty.

Joseph and Mary appear to be living in Jerusalem, from where they set off for

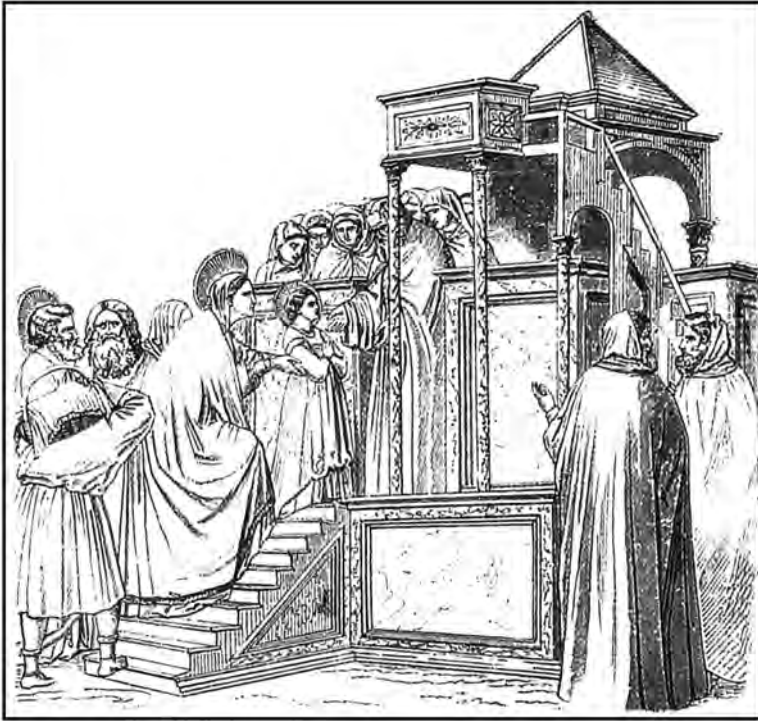


Figure 30.2 The presentation of Mary, aged three, in the Temple; drawing after Giotto's painting in the Arena Chapel in Padua. From Quilter (1880).

Bethlehem when the census is decreed. In one of its permanent contributions to the Christian imagination, the *Protevangelium* depicts Joseph seating the heavily pregnant Mary on a donkey for the journey. Another such contribution is its location of the birth of Jesus in a cave (a detail also found in Justin Martyr, writing at about the same time). They are only halfway to Bethlehem when Mary is about to give birth. Joseph leaves her with his sons in the cave, the only shelter in this desert region, while he goes to seek a midwife. He soon meets one who, entering the cave, witnesses the miraculous birth of Jesus. A cloud overshadows the cave; then an unbearably bright light appears in the cave; the child appears as the light withdraws. The midwife, deeply impressed, meets Salome outside the cave, and tells her she has witnessed a virgin give birth. (Salome is probably Joseph's daughter, though in later versions of the story she becomes a second midwife.) The sceptical Salome refuses to believe unless she can put her finger on Mary's intact flesh. (There is clearly an echo of the Fourth Gospel's story of Thomas refusing to believe without himself touching the risen Christ.) Because she has tempted God with it, Salome's hand is consumed, but is healed when she prays and touches the new-born child.

The story of the visit of the magi is then told, following Matthew's account. When Herod decrees the slaughter of the children, Mary hides Jesus by wrapping him in swaddling clothes and laying him in a manger. Elizabeth flees from her home

in fear with her son John, and a mountain opens to receive and to hide them. When Herod's officers can get no information from Zechariah as to the whereabouts of his son, Herod orders his death. He is murdered in the Temple, where the priests later find his blood petrified, though his body has vanished.

Literary character

The literary tradition to which the *Protevangelium* most obviously belongs is that of Jewish narrative works (sometimes called 'rewritten Bible' or, less accurately, 'mid-rash') which retell the biblical histories, expanding on the biblical versions in order to explain problems raised by the biblical texts, to fill in the gaps, to satisfy curiosity, to put a particular theological or ideological slant on the stories, and to enable readers imaginatively to enter the world of the biblical stories and characters more fully (see Cothenet 1988). Such works often create new stories inspired by – though deliberately also differing from – those told in the Bible about other characters. This is what happens in the *Protevangelium* when the story of Mary's conception and birth echoes those of Isaac, Samson and especially Samuel, or when the story of Salome's scepticism about the virgin birth parallels the Fourth Gospel's story of Thomas's scepticism about the resurrection. The imaginative account of Mary's birth and childhood satisfies the sense that someone of such significance as Mary in the history of salvation must have been marked out and prepared for this role from before her birth, just as Jewish literature told extra-biblical stories about the births of Noah (1 *Enoch* 106), Melchizedek (2 *Enoch* 71) and Moses (Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 9). The later part of the *Protevangelium* is the first literary attempt to reconcile the two canonical narratives about Jesus' birth in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The freedom with which it sometimes treats these latter (especially in matters of geography) is surprising, but not entirely unparalleled in the Jewish 'rewritten Bible' texts. Typical of Jewish exegetical method is the way the *Protevangelium* creates stories which explain some feature of the scriptural text. For example, Luke's statement that Mary laid the child Jesus in a manger (Luke 2:7) is explained as a way of hiding the child from Herod's soldiers. The Gospels' reference to the murder of Zechariah in the temple (Matt. 23:35; Luke 11:51) seemed to imply that this was a recent event (rather than the event narrated in 2 Chr. 24:19–22) and so required a story to explain it. The *Protevangelium*, following the common exegetical technique of assuming characters with the same name to be identical, therefore tells a story of the murder of Zechariah the father of John the Baptist, in consequence of Herod's attempt to destroy the Messianic child.

Apologetic and polemic

Several features of the narrative suggest that it was at least partly designed to deflect charges made about Jesus' background and origins in Jewish polemic against Christians, which we know to have been current in the second century, principally from the citation of them in the work of the pagan anti-Christian writer Celsus. Since both Jews and pagans were contemptuous of Jesus' humble origins, the *Protevangelium* begins by pointing out that his grandfather Joachim was very wealthy, while

Joseph's trade is portrayed as that of a master builder. The fact that no mention is made of Nazareth is probably due to concern to deny that Jesus' origins were obscure. Mary was not a girl forced to earn her living by spinning, as the polemic asserted; she did spin, but what she made, according to the *Protevangelium*, was the curtain for the Temple. Against the slander that Jesus was conceived through extra-marital union, the *Protevangelium* is at great pains to relate how Mary's virginity was safeguarded and her innocence demonstrated in a way the Temple authorities themselves accepted. It may not be accidental that the flight into Egypt goes unmentioned, since Jewish polemic portrayed Jesus as a magician who learned his magic in Egypt.

Along with these responses to Jewish polemic goes a Christian counter-polemic against the Jews. On the way to Bethlehem, Joseph is puzzled that Mary appears to be mourning and laughing at the same time. She explains: 'I see with my eyes two peoples, one weeping and lamenting and one rejoicing and exulting.' While the passage echoes Genesis 25:23, it evidently means that Mary's son is to be the occasion for the sorrow of the Jews as well as for the rejoicing of Christians. From this perspective the way the *Protevangelium* ends, with the story of the murder of Zechariah, often thought to be a later addition, is appropriate and effective. When Zechariah's blood is found in the Temple, a voice declares that it will not be wiped away until his avenger comes, referring no doubt to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.

Mariology

The way the *Protevangelium* develops the theme of Mary's virginity is a major step on the way to the mariological doctrines of a later period. To the canonical Gospels' claim that Mary was a virgin when she conceived Jesus, the *Protevangelium* adds the claim that Jesus' birth was miraculous, such that Mary's virginity was preserved through it (the *virginitas in partu*), while it also implies that Mary remained a virgin thereafter, in that it depicts Joseph's children as those of his first wife, not Mary. These ideas are found in other second-century texts and so were not original to the *Protevangelium*, but it undoubtedly promoted them. It is not clear that they constitute an idealization of virginity as such. The idea of the miraculous birth probably has a scriptural origin (Isa. 66:7), while the emphasis on Mary's virginity seems related to her consecration for a unique role. That she remained a lifelong virgin may reflect a sense that the womb which had borne the Son of God should not be subsequently used for other and ordinary births (cf. 1 Sam. 6:7). Mary's special consecration for her extraordinary role in God's purposes is the focus of the work, rather than her lifelong virginity as an example to be imitated. On the other hand, sexual asceticism was certainly already current as an ideal in some Christian circles in the later second century, as the apocryphal Acts testify (see pp. 808–9), and so the *Protevangelium* may owe something to that context.

It is noteworthy that the *Protevangelium*'s interest in Mary is not properly biographical (by contrast with medieval lives of the Virgin). It does not continue her story beyond her role in salvation history, which it does not extend beyond the birth of Jesus. Its interest is solely in the way Mary was prepared for and fulfilled her unique vocation to be the virgin mother of the Saviour.

THE INFANCY GOSPEL OF THOMAS

Both curiosity and convention required appropriate stories, not only about the background and birth of a great man, but also about his childhood. Such stories, like the only one the canonical Gospels tell about the boy Jesus (Luke 2:41–51) or one which Jewish tradition told about the young Abraham (*Jubilees* 11.18–24), should prefigure the role which the adult is going to play in history. The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, also from the second century, complements the *Protevangelium of James* by telling stories of the miracles done by Jesus between the ages of five and twelve, concluding by reproducing Luke's story of the 12-year-old Jesus in the Temple, thereby attaching itself to the canonical Gospel story (see Gero 1971).

The fact that a non-biblical character, Annas the scribe, appears in both the *Protevangelium* and the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* suggests that the author of the latter knew the former and deliberately filled the chronological gap left between the *Protevangelium* and the canonical Gospel story. The title *Infancy Gospel* is modern, but the attribution to the apostle Thomas is ancient, and probably indicates that the work derives from the Christian tradition of the east Syrian area, which connected itself especially with Thomas (cf. the *Acts of Thomas*, discussed on pp. 798, 807–9). However, it displays none of the special theological characteristics of that tradition.

This work has none of the literary sophistication of the *Protevangelium of James*. What literary skill it displays consists in the telling of stories concisely and vividly. The miracles the boy Jesus performs anticipate, within the world of Jesus' childhood in Nazareth, the kinds of miracles he would perform in his adult ministry. Miracles of cursing and destruction occur disproportionately often, but there are also, for example, a miracle of raising the dead and a miracle of multiplication of wheat. The effect these miracles have in the stories corresponds to the way the gospel miracles were commonly understood in the patristic period: they demonstrate to people that Jesus is no mere human. One of the more sophisticated and attractive is the first story, in which the 5-year-old Jesus, playing at the ford of a brook, 'gathered together into pools the water that flowed by, and made it at once clean, and commanded it by his word alone'. Then 'he made soft clay and fashioned from it twelve sparrows', who later, at his word, flew away. Jesus thus imitates his Father's work in creation, gathering the waters and creating living things. The fact that these miracles occur on a Sabbath indicates that he claims his Father's prerogative to give life on the Sabbath, as the adult Jesus does in John 5.

Later writings in the tradition of the *Protevangelium of James* and the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, especially the Latin apocryphal *Gospel of Matthew* (usually known as Pseudo-Matthew) which was very influential in the medieval West, drew on both works, taking over most of their contents and supplementing them in order to tell a continuous story from the birth of Mary through the childhood of Jesus. Thus, even where the two second-century works themselves were not known, the stories they told continued to be told, as well as illustrated in art, throughout the medieval period and later.

APOCRYPHAL ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The literary genre in which the narrative imagination of early Christianity was most extensively expressed was that of apostolic acts (see Findlay 1923; Bovon 1981). The earliest of the apocryphal acts of apostles date from the mid-second century or even a little earlier, and such works continued to be written for centuries in a tradition continued also to some extent in the lives of post-apostolic saints. Here we shall focus on the five oldest of these acts, written between the early second and early third centuries: the *Acts of John* (Bremmer 1995), *Andrew* (Prieur 1989; Pao 1995; Bremmer 1998b), *Peter* (Perkins 1994; Bremmer 1998a), *Paul* (Brock 1994; Bremmer 1996), and *Thomas* (Germond 1996; Tissot 1998). (This may be the chronological order, but, although there are undoubtedly literary connections between some of these works and influences of some on others, the directions of dependence and influence are not agreed, and the chronological sequence therefore quite debatable.) Only in the case of the *Acts of Thomas* has the complete text survived (probably best in the Greek version, although the work was probably composed in Syriac). In the other four cases, the text has to be reconstructed – with more or less confidence and with larger or smaller lacunae – from fragments and later adaptations of parts of the text, so that in no case do we have a complete text, though in most cases a large proportion is reasonably secure. These five texts were put together as a corpus only in the fourth century by the Manichaeans, but they have evident affinities.

These various acts are similar in that each narrates the final part of the apostolic ministry of the apostle in question, ending with his death (martyrdom except in the case of John, who dies peacefully). The *Acts of Thomas* begins with a scene in Jerusalem, in which the nations of the world are divided among the apostles and India is allotted to Thomas. Thomas, despite his initial unwillingness to accept this allocation, travels by sea to India, where the rest of the work is set. The *Acts of Andrew* probably began with the same scene in Jerusalem, with Andrew receiving Achaia as his allotted mission field, and went on to describe Andrew's travels in northern Asia Minor and Greece, especially Philippi, Corinth and Patras, where he suffers martyrdom. The original form of the *Acts of Peter* evidently also began in Jerusalem, where Peter is said to have stayed for 12 years after the resurrection; in the surviving text we are told only of his voyage to Rome and his ministry there. The *Acts of Paul* relates the apostle's travels in much the same areas as those which feature in the account of Paul in the canonical Acts, ending with a journey from Corinth to Italy and Paul's martyrdom in Rome. This has usually been understood as an alternative account of Paul's missionary career, paralleling that of the canonical Acts, but it can also plausibly be seen as a sequel to Acts, narrating travels Paul was believed to have undertaken between the end of Luke's narrative and his later return to Rome (see Bauckham 1993). Finally, the *Acts of John* tells of the apostle's ministry in Ephesus and other cities of the province of Asia, concluding with his death in Ephesus. The beginning of the narrative is lost, but the fact that John is depicted as an older man implies that only the final period of his life was covered.

The apocryphal Acts and the canonical Acts of the Apostles

These five works are each distinctive in structure, style, content and ideology, but they also have much in common and clearly constitute a genre of literature not quite like anything else, although they have been and can be profitably compared with several other types of ancient literature. They are certainly modelled to varying degrees on the canonical Acts of the Apostles. It was Luke's work, especially when read as a work distinct from Luke's Gospel, that structured salvation history in such a way as to make the missionary activity of an apostle, beginning at some point after the resurrection, readily conceivable as a narrative unity. None of the apocryphal Acts narrate – except in flashbacks in speeches – either the early lives of the apostles or their time with the earthly Jesus. For this reason, they cannot be classified simply as biographies. They are biographical only in a special sense determined by the Christian concept of the role of an apostle in salvation history. On the other hand, they are more biographical than the canonical Acts is. Even though Luke's narrative focuses almost exclusively on Paul in the second half of Acts, the fact that it ends at the point it does shows that the interest in Paul is subordinated to a non-biographical conception of the work as a whole. The fact that each of the apocryphal Acts tells one apostle's story and ends it with his death demonstrates a more biographical interest, which is in line with the growing popularity of biographical works in the period when the apocryphal Acts were written. To second-century Christians the canonical Acts seemed unfinished in that it did not continue its story as far as Paul's death, while Peter and John both disappear from its narrative at early stages without explanation. It is easy to see how, to a more biographical interest than Luke's, his Acts seemed in need of completion and supplementation.

A striking feature which distinguishes the *Acts of Paul* in particular from Luke's narrative of Paul, and aligns the former with Graeco-Roman biography in a way that is not true of Acts, is the inclusion of a physical description of Paul. Such descriptions were a standard feature of Greek and Roman biography. They are often conventional to some degree, reflecting the theories of physiognomics, which were popular in the second century and understood physical features as revelatory of character and aptitudes (see Malherbe 1986; Malina and Neyrey 1996: 100–52). The Roman historian Suetonius' physical descriptions of the emperors, for example, are determined as much by physiognomical theory as by the actual appearances of the emperors, even when these were readily available in the form of statues and images on coins. The description of Paul in the *Acts of Paul* – short, bald, bowlegged, with meeting eyebrows and a somewhat hooked nose – is to a large extent conventional, and was certainly not unflattering, as it appears to modern readers. Bowleggedness and meeting eyebrows were admired, the hooked nose was a sign of magnanimity, and a moderately small stature indicated quickness of intelligence (since the blood flowed more quickly around a small area and more quickly reached the heart, the seat of intelligence). The only feature which is surprising is the bald head, which might therefore reflect a historical reminiscence.

Despite the more biographical character of the apocryphal acts, it was the Lucan Acts that provided for them the model of an episodic travel narrative, including the

deeds, especially miracles, and the words of an apostle, which all the apocryphal Acts follow to some extent, those of Paul and Andrew most fully. It is not surprising that the *Acts of Paul* resembles the canonical Acts more than any other of the apocryphal acts, but in one respect the *Acts of John* is more similar. While its narrative is for the most part told in the third person, there are passages in the first person plural, which begin and end unaccountably in the midst of third-person narrative. This phenomenon is not easily explicable except as a deliberate imitation of the 'we-passages' of Acts. Unlike Acts, the *Acts of John* also uses the first-person singular, though only on two or three occasions (61; 73; 86?). The implied author is evidently one of John's close companions who travel with him, much like Luke's role in the canonical Acts according to the traditional understanding of the 'we-passages'. The beginning of the *Acts of John*, which might have identified the pseudonym to whom the first-person accounts were attributed, is not extant, but this supposed disciple of John may well have been Leucius, to whom all five of the apocryphal Acts were later attributed, but who is also attested as particularly related to John. (It has been suggested that the name was chosen for its similarity to the name Luke, suggesting a role parallel to that of Luke in his Acts.) The *Acts of Peter* also contains very brief occurrences of the first-person plural in the midst of third-person narrative, which are probably remnants of a wider usage in the original text. While the *Acts of Peter* differs both from the canonical Acts and from the other apocryphal Acts in that it seems to have contained only one journey by the apostle – from Jerusalem to Rome – it is related to the canonical Acts in a different way: Peter's conflict with Simon Magus (Acts 8) is continued and brought to a dramatic climax in Rome. The work ends with the crucifixion of Peter – but upside down at his request, a scene commemorated in many European paintings (see Figure 30.3).

Alongside these forms of dependence on the Lucan Acts, the apocryphal Acts also share significant differences from the canonical Acts. Their more biographical character has already been noticed. The miracles the apostles perform are, in general, more dramatic and impressive than those of the canonical Acts. Miracles of resurrection are especially common, and seem to be related to an understanding of conversion as rising to new life, which is not to be found in the canonical Acts. The predominance of upper-class characters, among both converts and opponents of the apostles, is not paralleled in Luke's Acts, nor are the stories, recurrent in the apocryphal Acts, of betrothed or married people, especially women, who practise sexual abstinence as part of their new Christian lifestyle (see pp. 808–9). While the canonical Acts contains episodes of excitement and adventure, such as Peter's escape from prison or Paul's sea voyage and shipwreck, intended to entertain while also instructing readers, the stories in the apocryphal Acts have far more sensational and fantastic elements: murder, parricide, self-castration, necrophilia, suicide, murderous demons, talking animals (even converted ones), a flying magician, a visit to hell, close encounters with wild animals in the amphitheatre, miraculous escape from execution by fire. Readerly pleasure is served by both melodramatic and humorous episodes, sometimes deliberately alternated. Among the light-hearted stories are the tale of the bed-bugs in the *Acts of John*, in which the apostle procures an uninterrupted night's sleep at an inn by banishing the bed-bugs temporarily from the bed, and the story which the *Acts of Andrew*, employing a stock motif, tells of a wife who

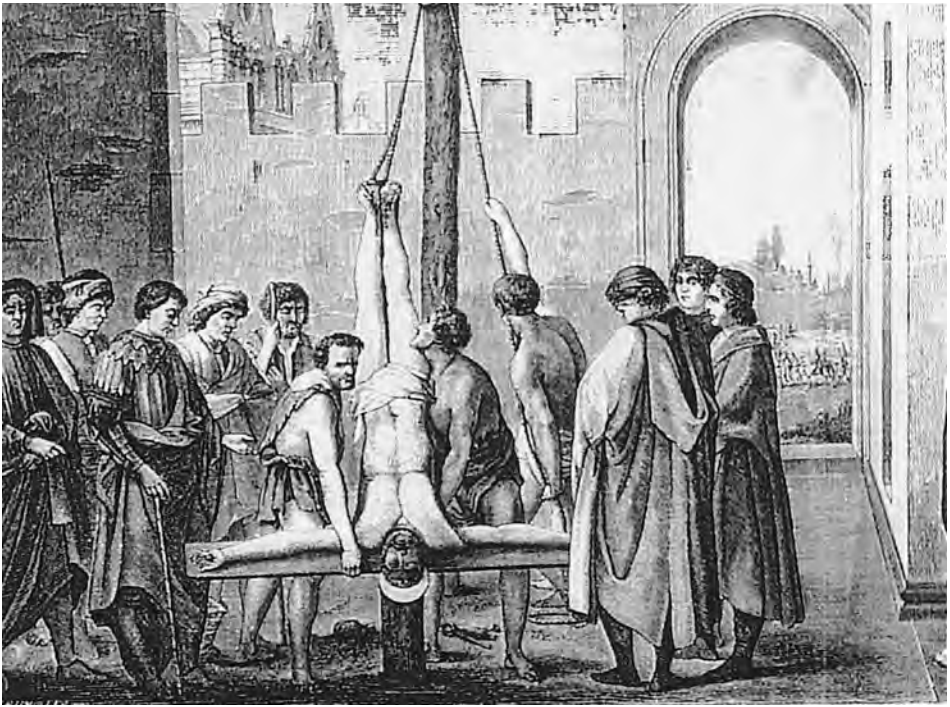


Figure 30.3 The martyrdom of Peter; drawing after a painting by Filippino Lippi in the Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence. From Phillimore (1881).

abstained from sexual relations with her husband by substituting her maid for herself in the marital bed.

The apocryphal Acts and the Greek novel

The elements of travel, upper-class setting, prominent female characters, adventure and excitement have prompted comparison with the Greek novel (or romance). The novel proper, i.e. the erotic novel (such as Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe* or Xenophon's *Ephesiaca*), whose popularity seems to have been at its height in the period when the apocryphal Acts were written, tells a story of two lovers who remain faithful to each other through separations, trials and dangerous adventures, before arriving at a happy and final reunion. To some degree these novels carry a moral message as well as being designed for maximum entertainment. In that sense, the combination of entertainment and edification at which the apocryphal Acts seem to aim brings them close to the erotic novel. Moreover, the stories – to be found in all the apocryphal Acts – of upper-class women who forsake their husbands or deny conjugal rights to their husbands in order to follow the apostle's teaching, employ an erotic motif which could be seen as paralleling and subverting the themes of faithful love and sexual consummation around which the plots of the novels revolve. But these similarities are not sufficient to place the apocryphal Acts in the genre of

the novel. Travel, for example, which in the plots of the novels functions to separate the lovers, serves a quite different purpose in the apocryphal Acts, where the travels are those of a Christian apostle charged with a mission of evangelism and care of the churches. More generally, the novels concern individuals in their private capacities, and their plots are limited to the personal lives and emotions of these individuals, whereas the apocryphal Acts portray the apostles as public figures, whose mission belongs to the purpose of God for the world and affects whole populations and regions. However much the emotions and aspirations of individuals are stressed in the stories these Acts tell, especially of conversions, such private affairs take their place in an overall story of public significance.

What we can conclude, from the features they share with the Greek novels, is that the apocryphal Acts may well have appealed – and have been designed to appeal – to a readership similar to that of the novels. Unfortunately, the nature of that readership is debatable. The view that the novels were a relatively popular literature, circulating more widely than other literary works, and attracting especially a female audience, has been challenged by the evidence of surviving papyrus fragments, whose relative numbers do not support the hypothesis of wide circulation, and by the observation that the literary sophistication of the novels presupposes not only a literate audience, but an educated one. On the other hand, it is likely that the novels which have survived are those of higher literary quality and sophistication, while the relatively unsophisticated apocryphal Acts (with the exception of the *Acts of Thomas*) resemble, in this respect, a somewhat more popular level of novelistic writing. The prominence of upper-class characters, including women who exercise considerable initiative and independence, cannot prove that either the novels or the apocryphal Acts were intended to appeal only to readers of the same class and gender. Popular literature often features characters from the social elite. (Marcellus, the Christian senator who appears prominently in the *Acts of Peter*, is unlikely to correspond to any historical Christians who were members of the Roman Senate at the time of writing.) But it is reasonable to assume that the target audience included women, who would find a variety of strong female characters to identify with, and who, in households wealthy enough to have educated slaves, would have slaves to read to them for entertainment.

If we envisage the apocryphal Acts as intended primarily to attract outsiders to the faith, and only secondarily to edify believers, we can easily understand the literary resemblances to the novels. If the targeted audience were primarily the literate elite, this does not mean that the apocryphal Acts pander to aristocratic prejudice. On the contrary, such frequent themes as the disobedience of upper-class Christian wives to their husbands and the apostle's conflict with civil and religious authorities, usually ending in martyrdom, are aimed against established order, while some of the Acts, especially those of Peter, encourage a kind of solidarity with the poor and marginal that was both alien to the elite of the Graeco-Roman world and also early Christianity's most distinctive socio-economic concern. Unlike the *Protevangelium of James* (see pp. 792–6), the *Acts of Peter* provides no refutation of the dismissive description of Jesus it puts on the lips of Simon Magus: 'Jesus the Nazarene, the son of a carpenter and a carpenter himself.'

Before leaving the subject of the resemblances between the apocryphal Acts and

the Greek novel, we should observe that one section of one of these Acts bears a much closer resemblance. The story of Thecla in the *Acts of Paul* (which later circulated as an independent narrative work, the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, no doubt in the interests of the cult of Thecla) must be seen as a deliberate small-scale equivalent to one of the erotic novels. Thecla, like the heroines of the novels, is a beautiful young woman of aristocratic birth who preserves her chastity and remains faithful to her beloved through trials and dangers in which she comes close to death but experiences divine deliverance. She escapes two unwanted and malevolent suitors, Thamyris and Alexander, as do the heroines of the novels. Unlike these heroines, her chastity is not, of course, temporary but permanent, and represents her total devotion to God. But her devotion to God is also devotion to his apostle Paul, who preaches sexual abstinence as essential to the Christian way. This devotion to Paul is depicted in terms which are certainly not to be read as sexual, but nevertheless parallel erotic passion. As in the case of the heroes and heroines of the novels, the plot partly turns on the separation of Paul and Thecla, her search for and reunion with him. When she offers to cut her hair short in order to follow him everywhere and when she adopts male dress to travel in search of Paul, these may be not primarily signs of her liberation from patriarchal structures, though there is no doubt that she is so liberated, but echoes of the novelistic theme of a woman travelling in male disguise in order to escape detection. It seems clear that Thecla's story has been directly modelled on the Greek novel, both in order to entertain a readership similar to that enjoyed by the novels, but also in order to express the message of sexual continence for the sake of devotion to God in an attractively symbolic way.

The apocryphal Acts and novelistic biography

The Greek novels were pure fiction, even if they originated as imitations of historiography and were apt to use some of the conventions of historiography (Morgan and Stoneman 1994; Holzberg 1995). While it is hard to believe that the frequently tall stories of the apocryphal acts were taken entirely literally by, at least, their more sophisticated readers, nevertheless it seems unlikely that their authors would have been happy for them to be regarded as wholly fictional. At least the apostles themselves were real historical figures. This suggests that, in search of the literary affinities of the apocryphal Acts, we should return to the category of biography, which we introduced when observing that these Acts are more biographical in form than the canonical Acts.

Momigliano makes this important comment on ancient biography:

The borderline between fiction and reality was thinner in biography than in ordinary historiography. What readers expected in biography was probably different from what they expected in political history. They wanted information about the education, the love affairs, and the character of their heroes. But these things are less easily documented than wars and political reforms. If biographers wanted to keep their public, they had to resort to fiction.

(Momigliano 1971: 56–7)

This comment needs qualification in the sense that some biographies were as scrupulously historical as the best ancient historiography. Indeed, one can perhaps speak of the emergence, by the time of writing of the apocryphal Acts, of two genres of biography: the historical, which remained close to good historical method, and the (for want of a better word) novelistic, which, while using sources, allowed more or less freedom to creative imagination. It is instructive to compare the works of a contemporary of some of the authors of the apocryphal Acts: Flavius Philostratus. His *Lives of the Sophists*, dependent on oral sources, no doubt share the limitations of the sources, but in these Philostratus does not indulge in free invention. Quite different is his *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*. Here the point where novelistic creativity takes over from history is impossible to determine, and scholars differ over whether even Philostratus' supposed source, Damis, is a novelistic invention. A quite different example of the same kind of contrast is between the histories of Alexander the Great and the freely imaginative Alexander romance.

There is no doubt that, if we are to associate the apocryphal Acts with ancient biography, then it is with the semi-fictional, novelistic biography that we should associate them. This is a category which made some claim to be historiography, but which allowed very wide scope for various kinds of historical imagination. Readers who put the apocryphal Acts in this category would expect them to be biographies of real historical persons, but would also expect a considerable and indeterminate admixture of fiction. Given only sparse historical details for their imagination to work on, authors of such works would be expected to make the most of these but not to be constrained by them. Entertainment and edification required an approach much more flexible than the methods of more scrupulous kinds of historiography.

Scholars have found it difficult to classify Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius* generically. It seems to be a combination of biography with the novel. But, rather than confusing its genre with that of the novel proper, it would be more appropriate to say that this example of novelistic biography borrows themes from the novel proper, just as the *Acts of Paul* does. The way in which erotic subplots are included in the story of the ascetic philosopher Apollonius, presumably to appeal to the same kind of readership as enjoyed the novels, is parallel to, though not the same as, the way erotic themes are introduced into the apocryphal Acts. The semi-fictional or novelistic biography can be influenced by the novel proper, but it is not this influence that makes it semi-fictional. It is in any case a semi-fictional genre, novelistic in its own way. What the influence of the novel in this case illustrates is the way the novelistic biography was a genre particularly hospitable to influence from other genres. Such hospitality helps us to understand the variety of literary elements that go to make up the various apocryphal Acts (e.g. the *Acts of Paul* contains letters passed between Paul and the Corinthian church; the *Acts of John* contains virtually a short Gospel; the *Acts of Thomas* contains poems and hymns; the *Acts of Andrew* shows particular affinities with the biographies of philosophers; folktale motifs are evident in some of the stories in the various Acts).

The *Life of Apollonius*, written in the early third century, tells the story of a first-century philosopher in a way which is based in history but is also freely imaginative. Another example is the *Life of Secundus the Philosopher* (Perry 1964). Secundus, put to

death by Hadrian for keeping to his vow of silence in defiance of the emperor's command to speak, also lived at roughly the same chronological remove from his biography as the apostles did from the time of composition of their apocryphal Acts. The plainly novelistic story which his *Life* tells to explain his vow of silence is plausibly understood as a sensational story woven around the historical fact of the philosopher's silence, which would no doubt have been actually connected with Pythagorean asceticism. That Secundus is portrayed, like the apostles, as a martyr also illustrates how at this period stories of heroic deaths for philosophical or religious principle appealed to both pagans and Christians. The martyrdoms of the apostles at the conclusions of the apocryphal Acts could serve the propagandist aims of these Acts, just as historical martyrdoms in the amphitheatres and elsewhere did.

The apocryphal Acts are best described, then, as works of novelistic biographical character (not strictly biographies) suited to the telling of the story of a Christian apostle and defined as the semi-fictional narrative of the missionary activity of an apostle subsequent to the resurrection of Jesus and ending with the apostle's death. While modelled in part on the canonical Acts, they are at once more biographical and more fictional than the canonical Acts. They partake in several ways in the literary currents of the period in which they originated, a period in which biography in general and the novelistic biography in particular were popular, as was the erotic novel and the martyrology (whether as an element in biography or as a distinct genre).

Apocryphal Acts and Jewish 'rewritten' Bible texts

One further category of literature belongs to the literary context which accounts for the particular features of the apocryphal Acts. In discussion of the *Protevangelium of James* we have already encountered the tradition of Jewish narrative works which retell the biblical histories, explaining and expanding the biblical text with the imaginative development of stories about the biblical characters. Such works include both those which retell the biblical story with creative expansions (e.g. *Jubilees*, Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*, Artapanus) and those which tell largely extra-biblical stories about biblical characters (e.g. *Joseph and Aseneth*, *Jannes and Jambres*). This Jewish literature was widely read by Christians in the early centuries of Christianity. (In fact, most of it has been preserved only through Christian channels of transmission.) Most Christians who read, enjoyed and were instructed by it did not regard it as canonical scripture, as they regarded the Old Testament. Such Jewish works could well have suggested how the writings of the emerging New Testament canon could be extended (as by the *Acts of Paul* and the *Acts of Peter*) or supplemented (as by the *Acts of John* and the *Acts of Andrew*) by extra-canonical stories about the apostles. Some of these Jewish works use various forms of exegesis of the biblical text as the starting-point and stimulus for exercises in historical imagination, while others are more straightforwardly fictional creations.

We can observe both types among the apocryphal Acts. When its relationship to the canonical Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline letter corpus (including the Pastorals) is carefully studied, it becomes evident that the *Acts of Paul* uses many of the usual Jewish exegetical practices to explain and to expand the available

information about the period of Paul's missionary activity the author believed to have intervened between the end of Acts and the apostle's martyrdom (see Bauckham 1993). (It should also be noted that some of these techniques were also used by Hellenistic biographers of writers, faced with the need to eke out the minimal historical data available to them and to develop entertaining stories about their subjects: see Lefkowitz 1981.) The same kinds of methods as we observed in the case of the *Protevangelium of James* can also be identified in the *Acts of Paul*. References to persons and events in the Pastoral epistles, for example, are the basis for the creation of stories which explain them. Persons with the same names are identified. Metaphorical references, such as Paul's references to fighting with wild animals in Ephesus (1 Cor. 15:32) and being delivered from the lion's mouth (2 Tim. 4:17), are taken literally and an appropriate story created to explain them (Paul is thrown to the wild animals in the amphitheatre of Ephesus and escapes death when the lion turns out to be one he had befriended on an earlier occasion). New stories are formed on the model of existing ones, similar but also deliberately different: for example, Luke's story about Eutychus (Acts 20:7–12) inspires another story about the emperor's cup-bearer Patroclus in the *Acts of Paul*. The latter is not, as some have argued, a variant of the same oral tradition as Luke knew, but an example of a well-evidenced literary practice of modelling new stories on old, especially new stories about biblical characters on biblical stories about the same or other characters. While this practice is rare in the other apocryphal Acts, the comparable practice of modelling a new story about one apostle on a story about another apostle in his apocryphal Acts is common, and accounts for the various narrative motifs which, unknown elsewhere, recur in these texts. (Of course, the repetition of narrative motifs was common in all forms of ancient narrative literature, and, when used in historiography, did not impair historical credibility as it would for modern readers.) In comparison with the *Acts of Paul*, the other apocryphal Acts clearly had far less biographical data about their respective apostles already available to base their creative storytelling on, but there are a few other examples of exegetical imagination. The famous 'Quo Vadis?' story in the *Acts of Peter* is probably inspired by John 13:36–7. In the main the non-Pauline apocryphal Acts resorted to narrative invention unrelated to New Testament texts.

Evangelism or edification

We have already raised the question whether the apocryphal acts are evangelistic works envisaging pagan readers and seeking their conversion, or whether they are edificatory works for established believers. There are several indications of the former. The entertaining nature of these works as narrative literature may well be calculated to appeal to outsiders who enjoyed similarly entertaining narrative literature of other types, though there is no reason to think that Christian readers would not also appreciate this feature of the Acts. Many of the stories in the Acts are stories of the conversion of individuals or a group of related individuals to faith. There are more than thirty such stories in the five apocryphal Acts (including the restoration of apostate believers in the *Acts of Peter*), as well as general references to the conversions of large numbers of people through the miracles and preaching of the apostles.

In many cases, the miracle stories, which are so plentiful in the apocryphal Acts, function as demonstrations of the Christian God's power to deliver, to heal, to raise the dead, to outdo his demonic or human opponents, in such a way as to lead to the conversion of people who experience or witness these miracles.

This is probably the main reason why miracles of resurrection are so common in the apocryphal Acts (at least twelve such miracles in conversion stories). It is not simply that they are a particularly impressive form of miracle, but that they demonstrate the Christian God's power over life and death, and point to the eternal life that he gives to those who believe in Jesus. Like the raising of Lazarus in John 11, the miracles of resurrection point beyond the mere resuscitation to mortal life which is their physical effect, and function as signs of resurrection to eternal life, effected by God for the convert. As in John 11 (which has probably influenced the *Acts of John*), this coheres with the emphasis, in the *Acts of John* and the *Acts of Thomas*, on eternal life as Christian experience in the present. The *Acts of John* in particular interprets its resurrection stories with a theological understanding of conversion as resurrection from the state of death in which the sinful and unconverted person is. They are parables of the need to die in order to live. As the characters in the story recognize this, we should expect that the implied reader should also understand and experience conversion.

However, while many of the conversion stories seem designed for outsiders to the faith, it is not clear that we can generalize about the aims of the apocryphal Acts. Conversion stories are less prominent in the *Acts of Paul*, which often portrays Paul ministering to established churches. The *Acts of Thomas* is a work of considerable literary sophistication and theological depth, whose seemingly simple narratives are packed with symbolic and typological significance. It may well be a work designed to be read at more than one level or in a process of increasing penetration through the entertaining surface to the profounder message. Lalleman (1998) argues that, while the miracles stories and missionary preaching in the *Acts of John* aim at the conversion of outsiders, the gnostic section, which is not original to the work (chs 97–102), aims to initiate readers, who may well be non-gnostic Christians, into a gnostic understanding of Christ and salvation.

This gnostic section of the *Acts of John* is polemical in the sense that it expresses contempt for the non-gnostic Christians who do not – and, indeed, cannot – understand the true mystery. Only one other section of the apocryphal Acts seems to be written as propaganda for one form of Christianity against another. This is the correspondence between Paul and the Corinthian church in the *Acts of Paul*, whose polemic runs in the exact opposite direction from that of the *Acts of John*. The Corinthians are troubled by teachers of gnostic heresy which Paul rejects and refutes. But this polemic against gnosticism is confined to this section of the *Acts of Paul*, and cannot be understood as the overall aim of the work. The *Acts of Peter* gives much attention to Peter's restoration of Christians who have been led into apostasy by Simon Magus, but since there is virtually no account of Simon's teaching the work can scarcely be understood as polemic against heresy. In general the apocryphal Acts do not seem to aim at winning Christians of a different persuasion to their own brand of Christianity. Their polemic is confined to paganism, and their aims seem to be the conversion of pagans to the faith and the (non-polemical) edification of

believers in the faith. The balance of these two elements evidently varies from one work to another.

Asceticism and dualism

The Christian way entails the renunciation of the things of this world. This theme is common to all the apocryphal Acts, as to most Christianity of the period in which they were written. Such renunciation includes contempt for wealth and luxury and worldly honour, and may also include frugality in diet (it is a peculiarity of Eucharistic celebrations in the apocryphal Acts that wine is not used), but its most prominent feature in the apocryphal Acts is sexual abstinence. Most of the apostles in them preach the ideal of complete celibacy, and many stories illustrate this preaching and its socially disruptive effects.

A story which survives only as a fragment but probably belonged to the lost first part of the original *Acts of Peter* tells of the apostle's daughter. To save her from an unwanted suitor who abducted her, she was miraculously paralysed on one side of her body from head to toe. She remains so until someone asks Peter, who heals all others brought to him for healing, why he does not heal his own daughter. Peter does then heal her in order to show that God is able to do so, but at once restores the paralysis. The reason is that the girl is too beautiful for her own good, and needs the paralysis to protect her. Extreme as this story is, it should be remembered as counter-evidence to the claim that sexual abstinence functions in the apocryphal Acts as a form of female autonomy and liberation from male dominance.

More typical are stories of women who, under the influence of the apostle's preaching, abandon sexual relations with their husbands. In some cases the husband is won over to the same practice, but in three cases (Andrew, Peter, Thomas) it is a story of this kind that leads to the apostle's martyrdom. Thecla is the most prominent example of an unmarried woman who, against all the pressures of family and society, succeeds in remaining unmarried, as the apostle's teaching requires of her. The extent to which the Acts regard such sexual abstinence as necessary is debatable, and probably varies to some extent from one work to another. The *Acts of Thomas* seems the most emphatic in considering sexual activity wholly incompatible with Christian faith and salvation, and in this it reflects the encratite (from *enkrateia*, continence) Christianity of its context of origin, the second-century Christian tradition of the east Syrian area. In other Acts there are married couples who do not seem to be required to abstain from normal marital relations, but there is no doubt that celibacy is an ideal expressing the Christian's absolute devotion to God.

It is important to notice, however, that the theological context in which this sexual asceticism is understood is different in each case. The stories of sexual abstinence are a prime example of the way narrative motifs pass from one to another of these works but serve subtly or even obviously different theological agendas in each case. In the *Acts of Paul* the theological context is a kind of eschatological radicalism based especially on 1 Corinthians 7 ('Blessed are those who have wives as if they had them not . . .'). The dualism involved is the eschatological dualism of this world and the next, not at all a matter-spirit dualism. Sexual abstinence implies no depreciation of the body. On the contrary, it keeps the body pure ('Blessed are they

who have kept the flesh pure, for they shall become a temple of God'). Not the body but passions that defile the body are evil. So there is no contradiction involved when the Paul of the *Acts of Paul* also, in correspondence with the Corinthians, decisively condemns the gnostic dualism which denies that God created the human body, that Christ has come in the flesh and that there will be a resurrection of the flesh.

The much more developed theology of the *Acts of Thomas* is not dissimilar. Sexuality is bound up not with the body as such, but with death (since it is death that makes procreation necessary), sickness and other evils of the flesh which became part of human life at the fall. Sexual continence is restoration of the condition of Adam and Eve in paradise, and is associated with immortality. Enormous importance is attached to *enkrateia* because it is the key point in human life at which the forces of evil, which plague human life, can be resisted and overcome. The dualism here is between the transitory and the eternal, but not between the material and spiritual. In the *Acts of Andrew*, on the other hand, there is clear influence from the matter-spirit dualism with which the transitory-eternal dualism was associated in Greek philosophical traditions: Platonism and neo-Pythagoreanism. Salvation is the liberation of the soul, which is of divine origin, from the captivity of the body, and its reunion with God. Only through common affinities with Platonism does the *Acts of Andrew* resemble Gnosticism, but its Greek philosophical flavour, distinctive among the apocryphal Acts, differs markedly from the mythological idiom of Gnosticism.

Gnosticism itself is found only in that section of the *Acts of John* which is probably to be regarded as an addition to the original text: chapters 97-102. Here the cosmos is not the creation of the high and good God, but of an evil demiurge, who is identified with the God of the Old Testament, while the human spirit of the gnostic is alien to the body and the material world, discovering in gnosis its true home in the world above. This radical cosmic dualism, which characterizes Gnosticism in the useful sense of that term, is confined, among the apocryphal Acts, to this section of the *Acts of John*. While the rest of the *Acts of John* displays a spiritualizing tendency, stressing the new life of the spirit rather than the flesh, and so would have been congenial to a gnostic editor, it does not espouse the radical cosmic dualism of the gnostic section. On the other hand, there are no allusions to the Old Testament in the whole of the *Acts of John*, and thoroughgoing rejection of the Old Testament was distinctive of Gnosticism. The gnostic character of the form of the *Acts of John* that we have may not be entirely confined to the clearly gnostic section.

With these various forms of dualism are associated a variety of Christologies in the various Acts. In the *Acts of Andrew*, in so far as the text can be reconstructed, there is no reference at all to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Christ is indistinguishable from God, and it is the apostle Andrew who is both the revealer and the embodiment of salvation. In the *Acts of John* and (probably derivatively) in the *Acts of Peter*, with some traces also in the *Acts of Thomas*, is found a distinctive polymorphous Christology, which attributes to Christ no fixed form of earthly appearance, but one that changes at will, so that he is seen, even in his earthly life and even at the same time, in different forms by different people. The function of this in the *Acts of John* is clearly to remove the divine Christ from any real incarnation. This is a fully docetic Christology, whose Christ is explicitly not human at all. However, the same motif is differently interpreted in the much more 'orthodox' but

rather eclectic *Acts of Peter*. Here the milder docetism that is found also in the Alexandrian Fathers – a Jesus who did not need to eat or drink but did so for our sakes – understands the polymorphy as Christ's accommodation of himself to the capacities of the people he met. Once again we see a literary motif passed from one of the apocryphal Acts to another, but its significance shifting according to the theological outlook of the work in question.

Women in the apocryphal Acts

We have already noted the prominence of women, especially aristocratic women, among the converts to Christian faith in all of the apocryphal Acts, and the adoption of sexual continence by many of them. Some recent scholarship (see Davies 1980; MacDonald 1983; Burrus 1987) has given this feature of the Acts a strongly feminist interpretation, understanding celibacy as a form of liberation for women from the patriarchal structures of marriage and the family. It was the one way in which women could exercise autonomy and independence. The Acts are then thought to reflect circles of female ascetics in second-century Christianity, whose form of Christian life ran deliberately counter both to the patriarchal structures of society in general and to male-dominated forms of Christianity. Female authorship of some of the Acts, notably the *Acts of Paul*, or oral storytelling in circles of Christian women as the source of the stories about women in the apocryphal Acts, have been postulated (Kaestli 1990). These latter hypotheses are particularly fragile, since there is no good reason to doubt Tertullian's evidence (see below) that the author of the *Acts of Paul* was male, while our observations above about the literary modelling of stories on other stories in the apocryphal Acts themselves and the difficulty of detecting oral forms behind literary versions of stories make guesses about traditions behind them perilous.

The general approach of the apocryphal Acts to marriage does not, in fact, seem to be opposed to the patriarchal structure of marriage as such but to the sexual relationship within marriage. Certainly Christian wives intent on sexual continence are defying their husbands' authority in a way that the narratives approve. We should not forget that being a Christian wife to a non-Christian husband was itself a quite serious defiance of the patriarchal structure of marriage, a defiance to which all forms of Christianity were committed. In the stories in the apocryphal Acts, this assertion of the right to be a Christian by the wife of an unconverted husband is intensified and dramatized (in a way that makes for engaging narratives) by giving it the form of refusing sexual relations. That women among the social elite converted more readily than their husbands (for whom social impediments were a greater obstacle) is true to the social realities of Christianity at the time, and the narratives of the apocryphal Acts no doubt encourage such women to persevere bravely and to hope for their husbands' conversion. But it must also be noticed that in the apocryphal Acts marriage is no longer a problem when both partners are Christian and both agree to live together without sexual relations. This shows that the authority structure of marriage is seen as problematic only when profession and faithful practice of the Christian way by the wife are opposed by the husband.

However, in the case of Thecla we can find some truth in the feminist interpret-

ation. This story instantiates the preference for the unmarried state for the sake of the gospel and the equal rights of women and men to remain unmarried that Paul, at his most socially radical, expresses in 1 Corinthians 7. (The influence of this text on the Thecla story has not been sufficiently appreciated.) As an independent, unmarried woman she is no more subordinated to Paul's authority than his male disciples are, and she soon moves on to her own mission field and a lifetime of 'enlightening many with the word of God'. It was to this feature of the *Acts of Paul* that Tertullian objected, complaining of women who appealed to Thecla's example in order to defend the right of women to teach and to baptize (*De baptismo* 17). Whether this was the reason why, as he relates, the presbyter who wrote the work was condemned and deposed, is not clear. It certainly did not prevent the *Acts of Paul* remaining a popular work among Christians in general for quite some time after Tertullian wrote.

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PART VII

EXTERNAL CHALLENGES



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MARTYRDOM AND POLITICAL OPPRESSION



W. H. C. Frend

MARTYRDOM AND ITS JEWISH LEGACY

Why were the early Christians so unpopular with their contemporaries and subjected to political oppression and martyrdom? The question has been asked by scholars ever since the Enlightenment. Ludwig Mosheim writing his *Ecclesiastical History Ancient and Modern* at Göttingen in the 1750s asks, 'how it was that the excellent nature of the Christian religion, its admirable tendency to promote both the welfare of the state and the private felicity of individuals' (1767: 48) should have brought persecution on itself rather than the protection of the state. Gibbon asked the same question in slightly different words 20 years later. The Christian religion's 'Sanctity of its moral precepts and the innocent and obscure lives' of the first Christians 'should have been received with due reverence, even by the unbelieving world' (1802: ch. xvi, opening sentence). Yet even though persecutions were comparatively rare – Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, for instance, could assert (as reported by Eusebius) that he had served Christ 'eighty and six years' before he was brought to trial before the Proconsul of Asia as a Christian (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.15.20)¹ – there was always an underlying hostility towards the Christians. Tacitus in c. 115 CE describes them as a 'race of people hated for their abominations' and Christianity as a 'deadly superstition' (*superstitio*) at the time of the Neronian persecution in 64 (*Annals* 15.44.3), while even the heroism of the martyrs of Lyons, martyred in the amphitheatre of Lyons in August 177, evoked only uncomprehending pity among the Gallic provincials as their ashes were swept into the Rhone (*HE* 5.1.60, 62).

As we trace the saga of political oppression suffered by the Christians, we must also ask ourselves how far Christian attitudes and, in particular, a desire for martyrdom contributed to their fate. In the first generations of the church's existence the clue lies in the close association between Christianity and Judaism, that lasted through the first two centuries. Down to around 100 CE members of the Christ-movement regarded themselves as 'the new Israel'. Two of the later books of the New Testament, namely 1 Peter and the Letter of James, are addressed to the (Jewish) tribes of the Dispersion, and in particular, the Jews of the Roman provinces in Asia Minor (James 1.1; 1 Pet. 1.1). Reading 1 Clement (*the First Epistle of Clement of Rome to*

the Corinthians, written in Rome c. 95–100, it is clear also that the author regarded Christianity as a lineal progression from Judaism, quoting the Septuagint more than a hundred times and treating the Jewish hierarchy as foreshadowing the Christian ministry (1 *Clement* 42.5). During the second century, while the Christians were never able to make good their claim to be the legitimate successors of Judaism and Jesus Christ as the expected Messiah they remained in the eyes of the authorities a Judaistic sect, or as the Platonist and anti-Christian writer, Celsus, expressed it, apostates from Judaism (cited in Origen, *Contra Celsum* 2.1, 4).² It is interesting that at Smyrna in the mid-third century, the martyr, Pionius, not only quotes loud and long in his speeches from stories in the Old Testament, such as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as the fate awaiting pagans, but recounts how he had heard since his childhood Jews discussing the story of the witch of Endor and the return of the prophet Samuel to life through her necromancy (*Martyrium Pionii* 13 and 14).³ In western Asia Minor Jews and Christians had retained close if unneighbourly relations throughout this period.

The continued cultural affinity with Judaism and use of the Septuagint provided the Christians with models for attitudes towards the pagan world. Christ, as the martyrs of Lyons proclaimed in 177, was the 'faithful and true martyr' (*HE* 5.2.3; cf. Rev. 1:5), but running through Jewish scripture was the theme of the persecuted remnant. This was the faithful remnant of Israel oppressed but ultimately victorious over foreign overlords and idolators, looking forward to the establishment of a kingdom where God alone would be sovereign. Throughout the books of the Old Testament the loyal minority finds its champion in the prophets of Israel. The prophet was represented as a heroic figure destined to die rather than condone practices contrary to the Law. He is the prototype of the Christian martyr. In legend Isaiah and even Moses were added to Daniel and 'the Three Holy Children' as examples of those who were prepared to suffer rather than obey idolatrous rulers or the backsliders of their own race.⁴ The Hasmonean period (167–63 BCE) unloosed a whole series of heroic accounts of victorious suffering for the sake of upholding the purity of God's Law. The Teacher of Righteousness himself is recorded in the Dead Sea Scrolls as being persecuted and hounded by the Wicked Priest (*Commentary on Habakkuk* 1.10–15). In the literature of the time the tradition of the noble deaths of the 'Maccabean' youths and their mother rather than bow to the idolatrous demands of the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (179–165 BCE) became part and parcel of the martyr-literature of the church, even though the term 'martyr' was not used by the Jewish writers of the day. More than three centuries later in the account of the martyrs of Lyons, Blandina the confessor was compared to 'the noble mother who had encouraged her children and sent them forth triumphant to the king, having herself endured all the tortures of her children, hastened to them' (*HE* 5.1.55). The direct quotations from 2 Macc. 7:23–9, 41 show the author steeped in the Jewish Maccabean tradition. Sixty years later, in 236, Origen wrote his *Exhortation to Martyrdom* to his friend Ambrosius who appeared to be in danger from the persecution initiated by the emperor Maximin (235–38). Origen recounts in detail the story of the youths and their mother, paraphrasing 2 Macc. 6 and 7, and characterizing their deaths as 'an example of courageous martyrdom' (*Exhortation to Martyrdom* 22–3; Oulton and Chadwick 1954: 408–9). He then recalls the refusal of

Ananias, Azarias and Misael to sacrifice at the order of Nebuchadnezzar (*Exhortation to Martyrdom* 33). Jewish literature certainly, but 'even now', he claimed, Nebuchadnezzar is saying the very same thing to us, the true Hebrews 'whose home', Origen adds, 'is in the next world'. In the West, Cyprian recalls the seven Maccabean martyrs as examples for Christian martyrs to follow (Cyprian, *Epistle* 58.6 and *Ad Fortunatum* 11). During the Great Persecution of 303–13, Secundus of Tigisis, primate of Numidia compared (falsely!) his conduct with that of Eleazer the heroic priest in 2 Macc. 6:21–8 (Augustine, *Breviculus Collationis cum Donatistis* 3.13.25), while the confessors of Abitina (in western Tunisia) modelled their conduct on these heroes of Judaism (*Acta Saturnini* 16 [= PL 8, col. 700] 'Machabaeo more').

Apart from the glory and indeed the duty of dying rather than commit an act of idolatry another aspect of remnant theology absorbed by the Christians is revealed in the story of the 'Maccabean' mother. In a final speech put into her mouth by the writer of a tract, known as 4 Maccabees and probably composed in Antioch in c. 40 CE, the mother recounts how the boys' father read to them of Abel who was slain by Cain, and of Isaac who was offered as a burnt offering, and of Joseph in the prison. He spoke to them of Phineas the zealous priest, and he taught them about Ananias, Azarias and Misael in the fire. He sang the praises of Daniel in the den of lions and blest him, and he recalled the saying of Isaiah: 'Even though you pass through the fire, the flame shall not harm you.' He sang to them the psalm of David which says 'Many are the afflictions of the just' (4 Macc. 18.11–18).⁵ The allusive style of the passage suggests that the writer expected his audience to be fully acquainted with the stories. Persecution and suffering were the lot of the righteous from the beginning of time and would endure until the end of the present age. This aspect of remnant theology found a ready reception by Christians in the early centuries. Appreciation that they were enacting a process decreed by God since creation steeled their resolve in the face of political oppression and persecution. In the Donatist church in fourth-century North Africa it survived the conversion of Constantine and the triumph of Christianity.⁶

The inspiration of Jewish tradition for Christian martyrdom and its continuing influence at least in the first half of the fourth century should be evident enough. The heroes of Judaism, not least the Maccabees, remained heroes of the Christians in East and West alike down to the early fifth century. This view has, however, been challenged by the eminent classical historian G. W. Bowersock in his Wiles Lectures given at Queen's University, Belfast in May 1993. Bowersock believed that the Christian idea of martyrdom originated among the Christian communities in the cities of western Asia Minor, and that rather than having 'anything to do with Judaism or with Palestine, it had everything to do with the Greco-Roman world, its traditions, its language and its cultural tastes'. 'Martyrdom', he adds 'was thus solidly anchored in the civil life of the Greco-Roman world of the Roman empire', running its course in 'the great urban spaces of the agora and amphitheatre, the principal settings for public discourse and for public spectacle' (Bowersock 1995: 28, 54).

It is true, of course, that to die for truth or for a noble cause were acts remembered and praised in Graeco-Roman provincial society. Regulus, Socrates and Empedocles passed into its folk-memory as examples of heroic deaths. There is also an interesting passage in Celsus' *True Word*, quoted by Origen, suggesting that valorous death

extended to religion. 'If you happen to be a worshipper of God and someone commands you to act blasphemously or say some other disgraceful thing, you ought not to put any confidence in him at all. Rather than this, you must remain firm in the face of all tortures and endure any death rather than think anything profane about God.' Origen was surprised at Celsus' 'apparent recovery from demonic possession', though he rejects Celsus' subsequent naming of Helios or Athena as deities through whom 'the great God' was worshipped (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8.66–7). It is clear that so far as concerns Origen, dying if necessary for the honour of a pagan 'great God' had not inspired the conduct of Christians. In his *Exhortation to Martyrdom* Origen makes no reference to Stoic or pagan martyrdom, but only to biblical and Maccabean examples of heroism. In the West, Tertullian cites the example of the death of Socrates with approval 'because he was destroying the gods' (*Apol.* 11.15 and 14.7–8), but elsewhere he criticizes him severely for his immorality. He was 'a pander' and his death was therefore no model for Christian martyrdom (*Apol.* 39.13, where 'the philosopher a pander' refers to Socrates).

If one looks closely at examples of pagan self-sacrifice in the first two centuries CE, one can see that much of it was inspired on behalf of avowedly political causes. 'Come up Romans', shouts the Alexandrian Appian on his condemnation to death in Rome for denouncing the emperor (Commodus?) as a tyrant, 'see a unique spectacle, an Alexandrian gymnasiarch and ambassador being led to execution' (*Acts of the Pagan Martyrs* [*Acta Alexandrinorum*]; Musurillo 1972: 69). Here one can see the latent pride of the Macedonian-descended citizen of Alexandria outraged at the 'crudity' of his imperial adversary (and no doubt, the Roman authorities), but there is no transcending religious motive, no call on the Name of God as we find in the Maccabean Acta. All one can say is that in the first two centuries CE there was a living pagan tradition of self-sacrifice for a cause, a preparedness if necessary to defy an unjust ruler, that existed alongside the developing Christian concept of martyrdom inherited from Judaism. The two ideals ran parallel, but the Christians were almost exclusively indebted to their Jewish past.

The distance separating them is emphasized by another aspect of Christian conduct that alienated pagan opinion both official and popular – namely, voluntary martyrdom. Martyrdom as stated by Tertullian was the mark of election,⁷ the supreme honour to which a Christian might aspire. Little wonder then that it was eagerly sought. To quote Celsus again, Christians 'deliberately rush forward to arouse the wrath of an emperor which brings upon us blows and tortures and even death' (*Contra Celsum* 8.65). A well-known example of this attitude is quoted by Tertullian. In his address to the proconsul Scapula he tells how in c. 185 a mob confronted the proconsul of Asia, Arrius Antoninus, while he was on a judicial tour. They declared themselves to be Christians and clamoured to be put to death. The exasperated official, after ordering a few to be executed, replied, 'You wretches, if you want to die, you have cliffs to leap from and ropes to hang by' (*Ad Scapulam* [*To Scapula*] 5.1). Mass suicidal tendencies, *pace* Bowersock, belong to the Semitic rather than the Graeco-Roman tradition. It can be illustrated by the action of the Carthaginian survivors from their defeat at the battle of Himera in 480 BCE, or by the citizens of Carthage in 146 BCE, when they realized the hopelessness of resistance against the besieging Roman armies. Among the Jews, Philo records in c. 40 CE how

his people were used to accepting death willingly as if it were immortality in order not to allow any of their ancestral customs, even the smallest, to be abrogated (*Legatio ad Gaium* 16.117; cf. the edition of Smallwood 1961). When the danger intensified of Caligula placing his statue within the Temple precincts in Jerusalem in 40–1 CE, scores of Jews went out to appeal to the governor of Syria, Petronius, to do his utmost to prevent this. They were organized in orderly units, unarmed, but, ‘offering our own bodies as targets for the unerring missiles of those who wish to kill us’ and threatening to ‘bring our own wives to the Temple to slay them with our own hands’ (Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 32.229–30, 234), if Caligula’s plan went ahead. Not surprisingly, Petronius temporized, and by the time his messenger had reached Rome, Caligula was dead (24 January 41).

The Christians of Arrius Antoninus’ time were continuing this Jewish tradition to the unfeeling amazement of their contemporaries. All in all, Roman authorities were tolerant of dissent if it was kept within the bounds of philosophical argument and was not considered dangerous to the state and its institutions (see Francis 1995). What was feared was malevolence towards these by magical practices and subversive attitudes and actions (Francis 1995: 93–4). The Christians were perceived as deviants. Christ, in Celsus’ view, was a magician like his followers, preying on the gullible. These were the ‘actions of one hated by God, and a wicked sorcerer’ (*Contra Celsum* 1.71; Francis 1995: 139–40). The Jews were tolerated as worshippers of an ancient (if repulsive) religion (*Contra Celsum* 5.25), and they were prepared to pray for the emperor’s welfare.⁸ The Christians tried to subvert family life and traditional institutions (*Contra Celsum* 3.55), and were not prepared to give any recognition whatsoever to pagan rites or respect for the *genius* of the emperor.⁹ They put themselves beyond the pale of Graeco-Roman society. During the first two centuries CE, popular hatred previously reserved for the Jews was directed against them. Persecutions, sporadic but violent, were to be their lot. For their part, these provided Christians with the chance to bear witness to the truth of their faith. By the time the Book of Revelation was written (c. 90) witness had become witness to the death or ‘martyrdom’. Antipas, it was stated (Rev. 2:13) was not deterred from his witness by fear of death. During the first three centuries CE two systems of religion and life confronted each other. In the end there could only be one victor, and Constantine decided that this must be Christianity.

POLITICAL OPPRESSION

It was against an already existing background in which persecution and readiness to die for the truth were accepted in Jewish tradition¹⁰ that the Crucifixion took place. The death of Jesus followed in the wake of the priestly persecution of the Teacher of Righteousness, and the execution of John the Baptist at the orders of Herod Antipas. Jesus himself is represented in Luke’s Gospel as the prophet-martyr going to his death in Jerusalem as the prophets of Israel had done so before him (Downing 1963: 284–93; Frend 1965: 79–83). His followers, as mentioned, looked back on his death as that of the ‘faithful and true martyr’, whose fate it was an honour to imitate.

Not surprisingly then, the story of the early church in Jerusalem was one

characterized by oppression by Jesus' enemies, especially the Pharisees. According to the Acts of the Apostles, Stephen was stoned to death (7:54–8:1), and *c.* 41 the Christians suffered their first state-organized persecution through the execution of James, the brother of John, and the imprisonment of Peter at the orders of the conservative-minded King Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:1–5). The effect, however, was to disperse the Christians throughout Palestine and to spread their message accordingly. Barnabas became leader of this first Dispersion, while in Jerusalem, James, Jesus' brother, emerges as head of the church with Peter as his chief missionary.¹¹

The period 40–62 sees the expansion of the church, first into Judaea and Samaria, then under Barnabas and Paul into Asia Minor, and finally through the Pauline missions and their influence to the Greek mainland and south Italy. The decisions of the Council of Jerusalem, which possibly occurred in 48 (Acts 15), enabled gentiles to become full members of the Christ-movement without first submitting to the Law of Moses. This decision imaginatively made by James opened the way for Paul's missions through Asia Minor, first with Barnabas, and then with his own personal followers. By 52, Paul had crossed from Troas into Macedonia and set up communities in Philippi, Thessalonica and Corinth, before settling for three years in Ephesus (54–7). He planned to travel to Rome and from Rome to the edge of the Mediterranean and Jewish world in the towns of south-Eastern Spain. However, he arrived in Rome *c.* 60 CE under conditions he may not have anticipated.

Everywhere Paul had preached had resulted in bitter divisions among the Jewish community. While members of Paul's new communities in Thessalonica and Beroea may not have been actually oppressed, there is little doubt that their lives were not secure. 'The men who have made trouble all the world over have now come here', was the cry of the local Jews (Acts 17:6). Paul himself was subjected to beatings in the synagogues and seems to have been forced out of Ephesus and mainland Asia Minor through mob action (Acts 19:23ff.). When he arrived in Jerusalem in 58 he was in danger from a conspiracy to murder him. Eventually, in Rome, the Jewish delegation which met him told him that while they had heard nothing from Judaea to his discredit, 'all we know about this sect [of Christians] is that no one has a good word to say for it' (Acts 28:22).

The scene was now set for the first great clash between the Christians and the Roman authorities and the former's first experience of political oppression at the latter's hands. On 19 July 64 Rome was the victim of a conflagration that gutted three entire quarters of the city. It lasted for six days and seven nights. Thousands were made homeless. There is no eyewitness record of the disaster, but from Tacitus' account, well documented though written 60 years later, suspicion soon fell on the emperor Nero himself (*Annals* 15.44). His grandiose schemes for town planning were well known, and an unexpected high wind may have turned intended controlled destruction of buildings that lay in its path into a catastrophe. What was to happen now is matter for speculation. The likelihood, however, is that Nero tried to make the Jews scapegoats and the latter diverted the odium on to the upstart synagogue of the Christians. The latter were already being tarred with the same brush as the Jews as 'haters of the human race'.¹²

A 'huge number' (perhaps including Peter and Paul) were rounded up and done to death, possibly in the Circus of Gaius and Nero near Vatican Hill. The macabre

character of their deaths was designed to appease the gods whom the Christians were presumed to have outraged and to strike terror among the sectaries (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44; cf. 1 *Clement* 6.2). Suetonius, writing in c. 120, a few years after Tacitus, adds that the Christians were guilty of introducing a new and dangerous cult associated with magic.¹³ For the senatorial writers of the day Nero's action, though cruel, had crushed a dangerous conspiracy fomented by a new type of malevolent Jewish sectary.

Christianity was now an illegal religion, though the persecution does not seem to have been extended outside Rome. Christians could be arrested and tried as Christians, with associated crimes (*flagitia*) forming a secondary charge. This situation was to persist until the end of the Great Persecution in 312.¹⁴

Although the evidence for relations between Christians and the Roman authorities during the next half century is relatively scanty, it indicates harassment and persecution by the authorities. 1 Peter, written probably in western Asia Minor c. 80, speaks of Christians being maligned by pagans 'as criminals' (1 Pet. 2:12), being called to account (3:15), and encountering shame 'as a Christian' (4:16). Not long after, when Revelation was written (c. 90) there were martyrs, such as Antipas killed in Pergamum (Rev. 2:13), while in Smyrna the Jews are blamed for oppressing the faithful (2:9). Whether the execution of Flavius Clemens and the exile of his wife Flavia Domitilla to the island of Pandetaria (Pantellaria) by Domitian in 95 on the charge of 'atheism' was an act of political oppression aimed at upper-class Christians is uncertain (Dio Cassius 67.14; Frend 1965: 212–13). Christians, however, were being arrested, as shown by the letters of bishop Ignatius of Antioch written to churches in Asia Minor during his slow progress under guard to Rome c. 107. Among the Christians themselves attitudes to the empire were ambivalent, extending all the way from outspoken loyalty by Paul (Rom. 13) and the writer of 1 Peter (2:17) to equally intense hostility demonstrated by the writer of Revelation, sustained by hopes of vengeance on the pagans at the Last Day (Rev. 6:9–10).

The curtain is finally raised by the correspondence between the emperor Trajan and Pliny the Younger, his governor of the Black Sea province of Bithynia in 111–13. Pliny had been sent out with special powers to check the widespread corruption and abuses to which the province had fallen victim. Christianity was one of these. A slow progress had taken him to Amastris at the Eastern end of the province where he was confronted by a number of denunciations against individual Christians.¹⁵

Though Pliny tells the emperor that he had never participated in investigations of Christians and did not know therefore the precise nature of 'the crime usually punished' (whether the name itself or the secret crimes [*flagitia*] connected with it), he knew that Christianity was illegal for he had no hesitation in ordering that those who confessed be executed. Roman citizens were despatched to Rome for judgement. What he terms the 'obstinacy and unbending perversity' of the Christians deserved in any case to be punished. Christianity was an illegal cult with the aggravating circumstance of the disloyal attitude of its members.

So far, so good. What prompted Pliny to consult Trajan however, was that he had been presented with an anonymous pamphlet denouncing a large number of people as Christians. Many of these protested that they had renounced Christianity, three, five and even 20 years ago.¹⁶ There was also the practical problem, which must have

been obvious, of feeding the large number of those incarcerated. They should be either executed or freed as soon as possible.

Before writing, Pliny had made his own investigations. He had weeded out some who had obviously recanted, having them recite a prayer to the gods at his dictation, making supplication with incense and wine to the emperor's statue, and finally, cursing Christ — as a malevolent demon — 'none of which acts, it is said those who are really Christians can be forced into performing' (10.96.5). Other former Christians explained in some detail the liturgy of the cult and the suspension even of the common meal, which they claimed consisted of ordinary food, on Pliny's order banning associations (*betaerias*). Further inquiry, assisted by the torture of two female slaves who were styled 'deaconesses' convinced the governor that though the cult might be extravagant (*immodicam*) and depraved (*pravam*) it should not be regarded as a conspiracy (10.96.7). The situation had appeared serious, with Christian adherents in both town and country, but Pliny believed that his firm measures were already having their effect. Temples were being frequented once more, and animals brought forward for sacrifice. 'From this it may easily be supposed what a multitude of men can be reclaimed if there is place for repentance' (10.96.10).

The final sentence seems to have influenced Trajan's reply. While 'nothing can be laid down as a general ruling involving something like a set form of procedure', he said Christians were not to be sought out (i.e. treated as sacrilegious, *ipso facto* malefactors), but 'if they are accused and convicted they must be punished'; that is, Christianity remained illegal. However, anyone who recanted and 'worshipped our gods' should be pardoned. Anonymous accusations were not to be accepted. 'They were a very bad example and unworthy of our time' (10.97).

The emperor had attempted to square the circle and in the upshot had succeeded better than most similar compromises. He had praised Pliny's handling of the situation, and so long as they behaved with discretion Christians were unlikely to be denounced. None the less, their cult remained a 'superstition' — to other contemporaries such as Tacitus, a 'deadly' one — and hence anyone fairly convicted would be punished.

Trajan's ruling remained in force at least until the end of the century, when it was a subject of Tertullian's sarcastic wit (*Apologeticum* 2.6–9). It was reinforced in c. 125 when Hadrian sent a rescript to Minucius Fundanus, the proconsul of Asia, laying down that Christians had to be proved to be doing something 'contrary to the laws' before being punished. The courts were still open to genuine accusations, but libellous charges would be punishable 'by heavier penalties in accordance with their heinous guilt'.¹⁷

Justin Martyr attached a copy of the rescript to his First Apology (1 *Apol.* 68) written c. 155, suggesting that it secured the Christians from persecution, and 20 years later Melito of Sardes thought the same. They were wrong. We do not know the contents of the original petition to Fundanus' predecessor Serenius Granianus, but James Stevenson's suggestion that it may have contained charges of cannibalism, incest and sacrilege (1967: 22), such as Justin mentions, may not be far off the mark. They could have been included among the 'abominations' of which Christians were accused by the populace, according to Tacitus writing in c. 115. If that were so, Hadrian said, and if the petitioners could prove their case in the courts, the Chris-

tians would be punished. In effect, however, it needed an exceptionally determined individual to await the arrival of the provincial governor on judicial circuit to bring an accusation involving the death penalty against a Christian, especially because if he failed the charge could rebound on his shoulders (Sherwin-White 1952). The other contingency was that some natural disaster, such as an earthquake, would prompt the provincials to blame the Christians, and set off a persecution against them. The remainder of the second century provides examples of both situations.

The middle years of the second century provide instances both of martyrdom and political oppression. The second Jewish revolt saw the Christians persecuted by Bar Kochba's men. Bar Kochba, Justin claimed, gave orders that Christians alone should be led to cruel punishments, unless they would deny Jesus Christ and utter blasphemy (1 *Apol.* 1.31). Thirty years later, in the 160s, the Jews of Smyrna made common cause with the pagan provincials against bishop Polycarp.

The main conflict was, of course, between the Christians and the Roman authorities and the populace. The church was beginning to develop into a powerful organization. By 150, the great majority of, if not all, mainstream churches were organized hierarchically under a bishop or presbyter. Justin shows that a distinctive liturgy centred on the Eucharist was in place and that the canon of the New Testament was taking shape, to be read alongside traditional Jewish scripture. Under the pressure of gnostic and Marcionite deviations, the church was beginning to establish a distinctive canon of scripture and a theology based on its understanding of the nature of the Trinity. Credal statements were designed to exclude heretics, especially gnostics, by emphasizing the true humanity of Christ. Finally, throughout the Greek-speaking world bishops and other representatives of communities were keeping in contact with each other and setting out their views by correspondence over considerable distances. In 177/8 an account of the martyrdoms of the Christians at Lyons was on its way to their 'brethren in Asia and Phrygia who have the same faith and hope of redemption as you' (Eusebius, *HE* 5.1.3). A little later, (c. 190) the tombstone of Avircius Marcellus, bishop of Hieropolis in Phrygia, shows a merchant who was also an orthodox bishop travelling from Nisibis on Rome's Euphrates frontier all the way to Rome, finding the same Eucharistic and baptismal liturgy in force throughout all the communities he had visited.¹⁸ Near the end of the century, Irenaeus' five books *Against the Heresies* shows a self-confident and well-organized church firmly based on senior communities that could claim Apostolic foundation, of which Rome was the pre-eminent example. The challenge to the primacy of the pagan cults and the immortal gods of Rome was increasing.

But it was not yet regarded as formidable. One may agree with Gibbon's assessment of the second century CE of a Graeco-Roman world, prosperous, tolerant of local religious differences and ruled by a succession of rulers of exceptional ability (1802: opening sentences of ch. 1). Their success is shown by the growth of towns and cities all over the Roman empire, by an expansion of agriculture into areas previously semi-desert, by the fine pottery (Samian ware) found even on insignificant sites in distant Roman Britain. The urban classical civilization was sure of itself, and its representatives could afford to be tolerant within the framework of the law of mavericks and religious fanatics. Authentic accounts of the trials of Christians that have survived show that even in the Great Persecution senior administrators,

including proconsuls, often did their best to save Christians from what they considered dangerous folly. 'Respect your age . . . Swear by the genius of Caesar and say "Away with the atheists"', urged the proconsul of Asia on Polycarp (Eusebius, *HE* 4.15.15). 'We too are a religious people and our religion is a simple one: we swear by the genius of our lord, the emperor and we offer prayers for his health — as you also ought to do.' Thus, Vigellius Saturninus strove to persuade the Scillitan martyrs at Carthage in July 180, and he offered them a time for reflection before he passed sentence (*Acta Scillitanorum*; Musurillo 1972: 86–9). The offer was spurned, but that it was made indicates that oppression as such was far from the minds of second-century senior provincial administrators. All they wanted was conformity as proof of loyalty.

Oppression when it took place came from the people, stirred by irrational fears that by 150 were beginning to find expression also in deep-felt prejudices among some members of the senatorial class. Thus, Marcus Cornelius Fronto, tutor to the emperor Marcus Aurelius (161–80) was already painting a picture of Christian depravity which provincials would be accepting as true.¹⁹ Incest, lust and black magic were to be the popular charges against the Christians for the next half century and act as a spur to their harassment, torture and death. In contemporary accounts of the martyrdom of Polycarp and the martyrs of Lyons, the initiative for persecution came from the people. 'All the multitude of heathen and Jews living in Smyrna cried out with uncontrollable wrath and loud shouts, "This is the teacher of Asia [Polycarp], the father of the Christians, the destroyer of our gods, who teaches many neither to offer sacrifice nor to worship"'. They begged Philip the Asiarch to let loose a lion on Polycarp.²⁰ In the end Polycarp was burnt alive, Jews and gentiles making common cause against him.

At Lyons, it is doubtful whether the governor would have acted on his own against the Christians. He and his predecessors had let bishop Pothinus reach the age of 90 as leader of the community, which suggests a long period of official tolerance. The authorities' hands were forced by popular clamour in 177 CE. There was a mob uprising of increasing intensity against the Christian community (Eusebius, *HE* 5.1.7–8). The city authorities reacted, and had the Christians arrested and imprisoned until the governor arrived. Judgement could only be pronounced by him. Confronted by a semi-riotous situation the latter first allowed matters to take their course, letting the Christians be tortured. He went further, and condemned to death as murderers and perpetrators of other horrific crimes (the *flagitia*, about which Pliny had written to Trajan) those who had first denied that they were Christians. He was, however, a stickler for legality, and when he heard that one of the confessors was a Roman citizen, halted the proceedings to write to the emperor for advice (Eusebius, *HE* 5.1.44). Marcus Aurelius replied, on the lines of Trajan's answer to Pliny, that those who confessed should be 'tortured to death', but those who recanted should be freed (Eusebius, *HE* 5.1.47). Few seem to have benefited from the emperor's decision, and Blandina and the 47 Christians who perished in the amphitheatre of Lyons with her became heroines and martyrs for posterity.

By c. 200 however, the Christians in the Greek-speaking world were beginning to earn respect from some of their contemporaries. One of these was the physician Galen. Christians were known, he said, to be self-controlled in their food and drink



Figure 31.1 The amphitheatre at Lyons, scene of the mass martyrdom of Christians in 177 CE. Photo J. C. N. Coulston.

and 'in their pursuit of justice have attained a pitch not inferior to that of genuine philosophers'.²¹ This was a different view from that of Celsus, but the emergence of Christianity in Latin-speaking North Africa c. 180 was once again to sharpen the impact of religious conflict and emphasize the irreconcilable difference between the Roman gods and Christianity. The confessor Speratus' words to the proconsul of Africa in 180 illustrate the depth of alienation some North African Christians felt towards the empire. He refused to recognize 'the empire of this age'. His lord was the 'king of kings and emperor of all nations'. And he and his companions went cheerfully to their deaths. 'Today we are martyrs in the heavens. Thanks be to God'.²²

There was also a theological basis for this defiance; namely the primary role of the Holy Spirit in North African Christian thought. In the East, discussions on doctrine had ranged round the relations between God the Father and the Divine Word Incarnate. The Holy Spirit's existence was accepted, but no particular role had been assigned to Him. For Origen, he was still less 'than the Father and Son and dwelt within the saints alone' (*De Principiis* 1.3.5). He was the highest of the angels with correspondingly slight influence on human affairs. In the West, however, and in particular among the North African Christians, the role of the Spirit was crucial. The Spirit that inspired the Hebrew prophets was deemed to inspire the confessors. The church in North Africa was the Church of the Martyrs, and it deserved the title thoroughly. Christians in Carthage were as unpopular as their counterparts were in

Lyons and for the same reasons – namely, suspicion of incest, adultery and black magic practised in their rites,²³ and as the cause of natural disasters.²⁴ But they were also ‘ever ready for death’ (Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* 1). Already in c. 197 we hear of Christians being imprisoned, and as Tertullian (c. 160–240) declared, ‘the Holy Spirit entered the prison with them’ (*Ad Martyras* 1.3.) The Spirit was to be the force that sustained their faith, and their willingness to die cheerfully for their cause.

At the end of his Apology, written in c. 197, Tertullian claims that ‘we multiply whenever we are mown down by you. The blood of Christians is seed’ (*Apol.* 50.13). He was exaggerating. For some individuals, perhaps former Stoics like himself, the courage of the Christians in the face of death provided the impulse to ‘enquire further’, as he says, ‘into what lay within their religion and having inquired to join it’ (*Apol.* 50.15). But for countless others, the Christians were simply fanatics, ‘faggot-fellows’ and ‘half-axle men, because we are tied to a half-axle post’, who wished to die (*Apol.* 50.3).

One important test of opinion came in 202–3 with the execution of Perpetua, Felicitas and their companions in the amphitheatre at Carthage (see Figures 40.4, 40.5) on 7 March 203 (Musurillo 1972: 106–31). We cannot be sure whether these Christians converts, Perpetua coming from a well-known Carthaginian family, were the victims of a rescript directed by the emperor Septimius Severus against conversion either to Judaism or Christianity.²⁵ All that can be said is that between 202 and 206 Christians were arrested in Carthage, Rome, Corinth and Alexandria, four cities that are mentioned in contemporary literature (Frend 1965: 322–3), and that while senior clergy do not seem to have been troubled, converts faced the death penalty. While in prison Perpetua and her companions exercised considerable influence on their gaolers,²⁶ but once committed to the amphitheatre the spectators saw them as fanatics, traitors to the established order, threatening doom and destruction against the authorities who had condemned them. They alternated between horror at witnessing women being sent to their deaths naked, and pleasure at seeing the presbyter Saturus struck down by a leopard’s single bite. ‘Well washed, well washed’ (*Salvum lotum, salvum lotum*), they cried in crude satire at Christian baptism (*Passiones sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 21.2). Martyrdom was not to be a seed for Christians generally, until the Great Persecution (303–12) produced a gradual but permanent revision of attitudes towards them. At the time, ‘Christianos ad leonem’ was the popular cry (Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 40.2).

The persecutions of the first decade of the third century may have been partly official-inspired as well as expressions of popular antipathy. They were followed by a period of calm until the murder of Alexander Severus in 235. That emperor (222–35) was remembered later as having ‘allowed the Christians to be’ (‘Christianos esse passus est’; Lampridius, *Alexander Severus* 22.8.4²⁷) and it was in this period that the earliest Christian catacombs came into existence.²⁸ But mob attacks against Christians did not cease.²⁹ There was still pride in Rome for the worship of Jupiter, and one of the reasons for their hostility towards Elagabalus was that he had preferred Syrian gods to him.³⁰ Christians also suffered at the same time and it is now believed Pope Callistus was thrown down a well by the mob in the year 222.³¹

The tolerance of Alexander Severus towards the Christians was roughly reversed by his successor, the Thracian soldier Maximin. This time one may speak of ‘political



Figure 31.2 The Colosseum in Rome. Photo J. C. N. Coulston.

oppression'. Around 236 CE a short, sharp persecution was directed against the church's leaders – lay as well as clerical (Eusebius, *HE* 6.28). It inspired Origen to write his *Exhortation to Martyrdom* to his friend Ambrosius. On Maximin's removal in 238, the church enjoyed another spell of toleration under his successors, Gordian III (238–44) and Philip the Arab (244–9). The Christians' sudden reversal of fortunes under Decius (249–51) was as much due to the ever-increasing threats to the frontiers of the empire as to Decius' hostility towards the religious policies of his predecessor. Christianity had now emerged as one of the main internal problems in the empire.

With the advent of Decius a new situation arose. For the first time, perhaps with the exception of Severus' rescript, we enter a period of state-sponsored persecution. Popular perception of the Christians seems to have been no more favourable than in the past. In 248 Alexandria had witnessed a veritable pogrom when mobs turned on the Christians; some were seized and lynched, while others were dragged into temples and forced to sacrifice (Eusebius, *HE* 6.41). Origen, writing at the same period in Caesarea, foresaw the likelihood of a universal persecution.³² The event itself, however, was to some extent accidental. In 249 Gothic tribes crossed the Danube and invaded the Balkan provinces of the empire. The emperor Philip failed to drive them out and in the autumn of 249 was removed in favour of his general and prefect of Rome C. Quintus Messius Decius. On 3 January 250 Decius, it would appear, ordered that the usual annual sacrifice to Jupiter and the Roman gods on the Capitol should be repeated throughout the empire.³³ The edict was not specifically

aimed against the Christians, but they were caught in a dilemma. Either they obeyed the emperor's orders or they stood by their obligation not to sacrifice, and risked death.

The vast majority chose the former course. At Carthage, Cyprian, who had only recently become bishop, laments the mass apostasies that were taking place and records how crowds besieged the temples so much so that priests asked them to return the next day.³⁴ The sacrifice had become a token of loyalty to the empire, of solidarity 'with the Romans'. An inscription from Aphrodisias, the provincial capital of Caria, shows the emperor thanking the citizens for their support 'of our empire' and for 'their just sacrifices and prayers' (*Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua* 8.424, of Oct.–Nov. 250). Decius' aim was the restoration of the values of the past, and he himself adopted the name Trajanus to emphasize his kinship with the ideals of that 'Optimus princeps'.

Resisters were few. In Smyrna every effort was made to persuade the presbyter Pionius and his small band of followers to sacrifice, and follow the example of bishop Euctemon 'and everyone else' who had performed pagan rites in the temple of Nemesis.³⁵ Pagan officials openly ridiculed the Christian religion. There were loud guffaws when Pionius proclaimed his faith in the 'crucified one' (*Martyrdom of Pionius* [*Martyrium Pionii*] 16). To the very last moment, efforts were made to save him from the results of what the townspeople of Smyrna regarded as a useless act of folly (*Martyrdom* 21).

In Egypt a series of 43 certificates (*libelli*) have been discovered on papyri which show how the act of sacrifice was regarded as a solemn, formal act taking place before a supervisory commission. One example may be quoted:

First hand. To the commission chosen to superintend the sacrifices at the villae of Alexander's Isle. From Aurelius Diogenes, son of Satabous of the village of Alexander's Isle, aged 72 years with a scar over the right eyebrow. I have always sacrificed to the gods and now in your presence and in accordance with the edict I have made sacrifice and poured a libation and partaken of the sacred victims. I request you to certify this below. Farewell. I, Aurelius Diogenes have presented this petition.

It was a civic act formally witnessed and exactly dated, undertaken by an individual often on behalf of his family.³⁶

Meantime, Decius had swept the Goths out of Illyricum, and commemorated his success on his coinage, notably the 'Pannonia' type on Decius' *antoniniani* and *sestertii*. The church faced the severest test in its history. It was still an overwhelmingly urban organization, which meant that its leaders were usually well-known though not well-liked by their fellow-citizens. They could be denounced, and their congregations marked out for repression. By the end of 250, Rome had lost its bishop. Fabian had been one of the first to be executed (20 January 250), the emperor allegedly saying that he would rather face a usurper than another bishop (Cyprian, *Ep.* 55.9 (Hartel, *CSEL* iii.2, p. 630). Babylas of Antioch had suffered similarly (Eusebius, *HE* 6.39.4). Presumably Antioch was too tempting a target for Persian attack to risk disloyalty among its prominent citizens. In Carthage and Alexandria only a core of dedicated believers survived. Rescue came, however, first from the fact

that no follow-up had been planned which was designed to extirpate Christianity. A day set aside for sacrifices was proclaimed, and when it passed no further measures were apparently taken. Christians who lay low escaped. Second, in June 251 Decius was killed in battle against the Goths at Abrittus, among the marshes of the Danube delta whither he had advanced too hastily. The persecution ended with his death. Though there was a brief return under Gallus and Aemilian, this time apparently directed against the Christian leaders specifically, the crisis was over. Cyprian and Dionysius of Alexandria returned to their respective sees and were free to begin the work of salvage and reconstruction.

This is not the place to discuss Cyprian's policy towards the lapsed or its consequences for the North African theology of the church, a matter dealt with by James Alexander in Chapter 37. Suffice it to say that within a few years the church had recovered its numbers and on 1 September 256 Cyprian was able to assemble 87 bishops to support his view that heretics and schismatics coming into the church should be rebaptized, against the opposite view held by Pope Stephen.

The renewal of persecution by the emperor Valerian (253–60) in the summer of 257 may have had an economic as well as a religious motive. The 40 years between the death of Gordian III in 244 and the accession of Diocletian in 284 witnessed a decline in the standard of living throughout the cities of the empire. In North Africa, for example, few new public buildings were built in this period and dedications, whether private or public, are scarce. There was increasing insecurity in Numidia and Mauretania.³⁷ There was a catastrophic decline in the value of the currency, the silver content of the *antoninianus*, the coin most frequently used, dropping in c. 260 from 15% to a bare 2% by 265, represented by a thin silver wash on base metal (Mattingly and Sydenham 1927: 5–8). Local bronze coinage, the pride of the cities of the East, ceased. Aqueducts and other public buildings were neglected, and dedications to the gods declined correspondingly. The church, however, seems to have weathered the storm. In Carthage, the clergy were paid a stable monthly stipend.³⁸ In Rome the church had resources enough to maintain '1500 widows and poor persons' on its payroll (Eusebius, *HE*, 6.43.11). When Kabyle tribes struck in North Africa in 253, the church in Carthage was able to subscribe 100,000 sesterces for the ransom of prisoners (Cyprian, *Ep.* 62.4; *CSEL* 3.2, p. 700). Amid increasing signs of economic decline the relative wealth of the Christian church was a tempting target.

This time persecution was directed specifically against the church, as an institution, and its leaders. Eusebius puts the blame for the events that took place in the summer of 257 on Macrianus, Valerian's finance minister (*curator summarum rationum*), rather than on the emperor himself, whom he describes as having previously been well disposed towards the Christians (Eusebius, *HE* 7.10.3; Frend 1965: 422–3). The actual texts of Valerian's edicts have perished, but we can get a very fair idea of their tenor from Cyprian's letters and from Dionysius of Alexandria's account of his encounter with the deputy prefect of Egypt. The empire was in peril. Dura-Europos, the main fortress on the Euphrates frontier, had fallen to the Persians after a heroic defence (autumn 256). The favour of 'the gods' must be regained. Hence, Christians were required to 'recognize' the Roman gods, the 'saving gods' as the deputy prefect of Egypt, Aemilian told Dionysius.³⁹ The counterpart was that no

Christian services were to be held and the cemeteries where these would take place would be confiscated.⁴⁰ The authorities struck at the Christian leadership and institutional worship. Both Cyprian and Dionysius were summoned before high officials, and both refused to compromise. Cyprian asserted 'I am a Christian and a bishop. I know no other gods except the one true God', but he added that prayer was offered for the safety of the emperors (*Acta Proconsularia* 1). Dionysius answered the deputy prefect similarly but more courteously. For the latter the gods preserved the empire, and the Christian God was 'contrary to nature'. The Christians, however, were at liberty to worship their God so long as they worshipped 'the gods whom we all know' (Eusebius, *HE* 7.11.7). Like Cyprian, Dionysius refused and both bishops were sent into exile. Some of Cyprian's fellow-bishops fared less well, being committed to hard labour in the mines (Cyprian, *Ep.* 79).

The second edict a year later was more severe. Cyprian is our chief authority.⁴¹ Bishops, presbyters and deacons were to be arrested and punished. For the first time laymen were included. Senators, *virī egregii* and knights (*equestres*) would lose their dignities and property; likewise the *matronae* would be banished. In addition, the *Caesariani*, imperial civil servants, would be reduced to slavery and sent in chains to work on the imperial estates (*Ep.* 80.2). This was an attempt to deprive the church of its leaders, any social standing it possessed, and its property, in effect to root it out; and one notices that upper-class Roman women (*matronae*) were significant enough to require special measures.

In North Africa, Cyprian was summoned before the new proconsul, Galerius Maximus. The ensuing dialogue showed clearly the political character of the conflict that had now developed between the two religious systems. Within a few years the church had become a state within a state. Cyprian was condemned as the ringleader of 'an unlawful association'. He had lived an 'irreligious life'. He was 'an open enemy of the religion of Rome'.⁴² Despite being given a chance to conform to the religious observances of the emperors, he had refused to do so. He would therefore be executed. He died a martyr on 14 September 258. In Rome, Pope Xystus II and four deacons were discovered in the catacomb of Callistus and executed on the spot on 6 August 258.⁴³

This time the persecution continued. During 259 Theogenes, bishop of Hippo, and two other bishops were executed, and Cirta, the capital of Numidia, could boast the martyrs Marianus (a reader) and Jacobus (a deacon) and their companions. The populace was still strongly hostile. Political oppression had not yet outrun popular opinion.⁴⁴ The hand of the authorities was only stayed when news of the capture of Valerian by the Persians, near Edessa, filtered through. By 20 July 260 a new bishop of Rome, Dionysius (260–9) had been elected.⁴⁵ A rescript of Gallienus to the bishops in Egypt restoring their 'places of worship' (261) formally ended three years of repression (Eusebius, *HE* 7.13).

In the 'little peace' that lasted for the next 43 years, the church gained the advantage. Apart from Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch from 261 until deposed by a council in 268 for heresy, the church produced no outstanding leader that has left his mark on history. The emperors for their part were engaged in repelling attacks by Germanic barbarian invaders or dealing with usurpers, and had little time for the Christians. Only Aurelian (270–5), first acting as an arbitrator between Paul

of Samosata and his opponents over the ownership of the bishop's house in Antioch in 271 (Eusebius, *HE* 7.30.19–21), and then threatening to renew persecution in 275,⁴⁶ concerned himself with the affairs of the church. Christianity, however, remained illegal, especially in the army,⁴⁷ and a scattering of martyrs are recorded from these times. Yet all the while the church was prospering. In Rome, the catacombs underwent a huge expansion. By c. 300, that of Peter and Marcellinus contained about 11,000 burials in galleries that extended over two kilometres (Guyon 1987: 96–102). Sixty years later, Optatus of Milevis records that there were 40 churches in Rome at this time (*De Schismate Donatistarum* 2.4.5; *CSEL* 26, p. 39). Dated burial inscriptions begin to appear in Rome and Thessalonica, testifying perhaps to the dedicants' belief in the freedom and stability of their church. More significant was the decline of the pagan cults in some of the major provinces of the empire. In Numidia the last dated dedications to Saturn, hitherto the supreme deity in North Africa, end in 272.⁴⁸ In Cyrenaica the last dedications to Apollo date to 287–8 (Roques 1988: 318). Ancient expressions of language, such as inscriptions in hieroglyphics, fade out after the 250s, and in rural Egypt as well as in rural North Africa and parts of Asia Minor the pagan cults were being replaced by the Christian church. The beginnings of Coptic monasticism through Anthony in c. 270 typified the change that was coming over the Mediterranean world.

Diocletian (284–305) had been emperor for 18 years before he and his colleague Maximian (286–305) seriously considered a trial of strength with the Christians. They had found the empire in dire straits, threatened the length of its frontiers by enemies, the army mutinous, the economy at a low ebb even after Aurelian's reform of the coinage. In turn, the central and provincial administration, army, coinage, the economy represented by the Edict of Prices (in 301) had been reformed; also the cults, and in particular the imperial cults, had been restored in the cities along with public buildings that had decayed or collapsed in the previous half century.⁴⁹ The most pressing enemy, Persia, had been defeated in 297. Moral discipline was the subject of edicts, and in 298 (or 302) what Diocletian regarded as a noxious import from Persia, Manichaeism, proscribed. Manichaean literature was to be handed over to be burnt and members of the sect were made liable to execution. Old religious beliefs must be protected, said the emperors.⁵⁰ It would be the turn of the Christians next.

Pressure against them gradually built up. During the 290s a bitter propaganda campaign had been launched against them by Porphyry of Tyre (c. 232–304) and his Neoplatonist allies. They sought to discredit the New Testament, in particular Christ's disciples, and to downgrade Christ himself to the level of a wonderworking prophet.⁵¹ After 298, however, the emperors became involved. In that year, Christians were believed to have disrupted a sacrifice at Antioch at which Diocletian and his Caesar, Galerius, were present. Galerius was strongly anti-Christian, and after his defeat of the Persians in 297 his star was in the ascendant. Measures were undertaken to expel Christians from the Roman army. In North Africa there were martyrdoms among soldiers who refused to perform customary sacrifices.⁵² As Eusebius records, 'little by little persecution against us began',⁵³ until in the winter of 302–3 after a visit to the oracle of Apollo at Miletus the emperors' minds were made up. On 23 February 303 the first edict in a ten-year battle with the Christians was promulgated

in the imperial capital, Nicomedia. The feast of Terminalia would mark the beginning of the end of the Christian church (Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum* [*On the Death of the Persecutors*] 12.1).

The first edict recalled those of Valerian, without the sanction of the death penalty – Diocletian, according to the Christian writer and teacher Lactantius who was at Nicomedia at the time, had forbidden bloodshed (*De mortibus persecutorum*, 11.8). There were to be no martyrs. Churches were to be destroyed and scriptures handed over to the authorities for burning. Church property, including chattels, would be confiscated, and Christian officials removed from their offices. In civil life, Christians were subjected to a variety of annoyances. The *honestiores* were to lose privileges of birth and status, and Christians were banned the courts, where litigants were expected to cast incense on an altar before pleading their case.⁵⁴

In the provinces the edict was enforced to the letter, though not always with enthusiasm. Courtesies were observed up to a point, if events at Cirta, the capital of Numidia, are typical. There was a good deal of prevarication there by the clergy before bibles and church property were handed over to the municipal authorities.⁵⁵ Elsewhere, however, as at Caesarea in Palestine, there was more harshness.⁵⁶ During the summer of 303 further instructions were despatched to the provinces aimed against the episcopate. Bishops were to be arrested and forced to sacrifice, and meantime, the impossibility of a bloodless persecution was being demonstrated. In Phrygia, the seizure of a church in a nameless town resulted in the killing of the entire Christian congregation within it (Eusebius, *HE* 8.11.1).

In the autumn, Diocletian left Nicomedia for Rome where he intended to celebrate his Vicennalia. In the course of the customary amnesty for criminals bishops and others who had been arrested were compelled to make some gesture that implied 'sacrifice' and then freed. On his return from Rome, however, Diocletian became ill and unable to govern. Power fell to his Caesar, Galerius. In the spring of 304 the latter ordered a general sacrifice by the Christians. The edict was also enforced in the dominions of Diocletian's western colleague, Maximian.⁵⁷

This was the turning point in the persecution, and also in the fortunes of the Christians. Up to that moment, obdurate congregations, such as that of Abitina (Henchir Souar) in western Tunisia, had been arrested and imprisoned,⁵⁸ but, as Eusebius points out, in the East measures had been confined to the clergy.⁵⁹ Now, all Christians were involved. Would they rebel against 'our gods' or comply? The names of 34 North African martyrs were preserved on an inscription inscribed on a balustrade found in the church of Candidus at Ammaedara (Haidra, in south-west Tunisia) to be repeated on a celebratory mosaic in Byzantine times.⁶⁰ At Milevis in Numidia other martyrs suffered at the hands of the governor, Valerius Florus, on the 'day of incense burning' (*dies thurificationis*).⁶¹ In Palestine Eusebius chronicles scrupulously the names and sufferings of Christians there. A large number were sent to the mines (*Mart. Pal.* 8.1).

As in previous persecutions there were some purely voluntary martyrs. At Catania in Sicily the deacon Euplus shouted from outside the governor's (*consularis*) office, 'I wish to die for the name of Christ, for I am a Christian.' Carrying the Gospels he was brought before the startled governor, and after some argument reinforced by torture he was granted his wish (12 August 304, Musurillo 1972: 310–19).

Throughout the short but very sharp persecution in North Africa, the same irreconcilables remained. The last dated trial that has survived, that of Crispina of Thagora at Theveste, shows confessor and judge enunciating the same sentiments as had their predecessors a century or more before.⁶² The proconsul Annius Anullinus is shown to be as reasonable as his predecessors, far from the raging tyrant of later legend. 'Do you know of what is commanded by the sacred decree?' he asks Crispina. 'No, but I have never sacrificed and shall not do so save to the one true God and to our Lord, Jesus Christ, his Son who was born and died.' 'Break with this superstition', said Anullinus 'and bow your head to the sacred rites of the gods of Rome.' That was all that was asked. Crispina's refusal echoed that of the Scillitan martyrs in 180. Anullinus tried persuasion and argument, but, even without some gruesome details added possibly by a Donatist editor, the end was inevitable. Crispina, accompanied by five companions, was executed. A *martyrium* was raised on the site of her execution, to be succeeded by a vast (Donatist?) pilgrimage centre designed as a permanent memorial to her defiance and fortitude.⁶³

By now, the martyrdoms and steadfast conduct of many of the Christians were having their effect on pagan morale. Lactantius again; he claims that the numbers of Christians were increasing continuously and that persecution was one means permitted by God.⁶⁴ Elsewhere, he describes how 'great numbers were driven from the worship of the gods by their hatred of cruelty'. People, but in far greater numbers than in Tertullian's day, were questioning 'whether it was without reason that worship of the gods was so hated that men and women would rather suffer torture and death than participate'. These things, he added, had great effect.⁶⁵ The initiative for the first time, but decisively, now lay with the Christians. They were at last winning the argument.

Diocletian and Maximian abdicated amid great military displays on 1 May 305. Their successors were Constantius in the West and Galerius in the East. The persecution was not renewed in the West, but was continued in the East after a respite of about eleven months. The new Caesar, Maximin, was as strong a pagan as Galerius, but more prudent. There was a fifth edict in 306 which again required all to sacrifice, military officers checking the names of those who approached the temples (Eusebius, *Mart. Pal.* 4.8). Maximin, however, was not content with repression. He reorganized the pagan priesthood in his domains, which included Egypt, Palestine and Syria, on hierarchical lines in imitation of the Christian hierarchy (*HE* 8.14.9; 9.4.2), and unleashed a propaganda attack on the Christians. A supposed account by Pontius Pilate of Christ's trial was circulated in schools (*HE* 9.5; 7.1). It had enough effect to influence Eusebius of Caesarea to write his *Ecclesiastical History* relating the church's struggles and political oppression and heresy down to and including the present persecution.

Decisive help for the Christians was now at hand. In the spring of 311 Galerius became seriously ill. Realizing his end was near, and that he could not defeat the Christians, he drafted an edict recognizing his failure, allowing the Christians to 'exist again' and beseeching their prayers for his recovery. In vain, the edict was promulgated on 30 April and he died on 5 May (Lactantius, *De mortibus* 34-5; Stevenson 1967 [Document 246]).

There was now one final, dreadful flicker of state oppression. Maximin seized the

opportunity to take over Galerius' dominions in Asia Minor with the imperial capital, Nicomedia. Galerius' edict was either sidestepped or ignored. In Asia Minor a 'plebiscite' was organized through the provincial councils to vote the expulsion of the 'atheists' from beyond the provincial boundaries.⁶⁶ Egypt, however, witnessed the worst horrors, which would leave an indelible mark on the memory of the Copts. On 25 November 311 bishop Peter of Alexandria was executed, and the persecution extended to the now Christianized Coptic villages. Eusebius of Caesarea was in Egypt at the time and wrote down what he saw, 'And we ourselves beheld, when we were at these places many all at once in a single day, some of whom suffered decapitation others punishment of fire; so that the murderous axe was dulled and worn out . . . As soon as sentence was given against the first, some from one quarter and others from another would leap up before the tribunal and declare themselves Christians' (*HE* 8.9; 4–5). The martyrs had at last triumphed. Not surprisingly, the Coptic church commemorates its martyrs by beginning its era as 'the era of the Martyrs' with the accession of Diocletian in 284.

The end of the persecutions was decided, however, by events in the West. In the Gallic and Danubian provinces of the empire, Christians were not numerous and persecution had amounted to little. Constantius had died in 306, and after a series of political manoeuvres his son Constantine became ruler of the Gallic provinces and Spain in 310. Two years later he challenged Maxentius, son of the former emperor Maximian who had seized Italy and Africa, for control of the whole of the West. He succeeded. Maxentius was defeated and killed at the battle of the Milvian Bridge, five miles north of Rome, on 28 October 312. Constantine had previously been a convinced worshipper of the Sun-god to whom he had attributed his successes.⁶⁷ Now, as the result of a vision on the eve of his decisive battle with Maxentius, he came to believe that Christ, represented by a cross of light in his vision, was indeed God (*Lactantius, De Mortibus* 44.3–6), and persecution of his ministers and adherents must cease forthwith. During the winter of 312–13 confiscated lands were restored to the church, and in Africa the emperor had taken the side of bishop Caecilian of Carthage against those who claimed that he had been consecrated by a bishop who had handed over the Scriptures to the authorities (a *traditor*) and hence, that his consecration was invalid (*HE* 10.6 and Optatus of Milevis, *Against the Donatists* 1.20).⁶⁸

In February 313 Constantine met Licinius who ruled the Balkan provinces of the empire at Milan. They agreed not only that the persecution should end, and all lands and properties belonging to the church should be restored, but that there should be complete toleration for all to worship as they thought best. However, in the statement, which came to be known as the Edict of Milan, the Christians were represented positively as against 'the others', i.e. the pagans.⁶⁹ Licinius made a marriage alliance with Constantine, and two months later defeated Maximin. In the summer of 313 Maximin committed suicide. Twelve years later, the Council of Nicaea confirmed Christianity as the preferred religion of the empire as well as Constantine's personal conviction.

The story of official oppression and martyrdom was continued in Persia through the fourth and fifth centuries. Christians in the Persian empire were considered disloyal and pro-Roman, and were subjected to periods of repression.⁷⁰ They never

attained official status nor did they become a majority. In North Africa, on the other hand, the opponents of Caecilian had prevailed under their leader, Donatus. Throughout the fourth century this majority church among the North African Christians rejected the effects of Constantine's conversion. They regarded themselves still as aliens in the contemporary world and looked forward to a martyr's death. The church in the rest of the empire, however, had survived and triumphed. As Origen had said, it had spread its teaching despite the opposition of kings, governors, the Roman Senate, rulers everywhere and the common people' (*Contra Celsum* 2.79). Soon, alas, it would itself begin to persecute and make martyrs of those who disagreed with its teaching.

It is not easy therefore to speak of political oppression, except in the sense that all authority may be deemed oppressive by those who refuse obedience and deny its validity. The Roman empire, like the Seleucid rulers of Syria before it, was never able to come to terms with a monotheistic religion. It solved the problem with the Jews by marginalizing them and restricting them to narrow identifiable national limits. But with the Christians spread through all classes and throughout the Mediterranean world, and carrying no distinctive marks or emblems, this was impossible. Moreover, the fanaticism shown by some aroused a fanaticism among the pagan provincials, fuelled by rumours of vile and harmful magical practices by the Christians. The authorities were far from being the diabolical characters portrayed a century later by Prudentius in *Peristephanôn Liber* and in later martyr-legends. They had no choice but to act against adherents of a religion deemed since the Neronian persecution to be illegal, and which had become regarded increasingly as disloyal to the empire and its gods. That generally the authorities acted as reasonable men confronting a distasteful situation is clear from the *Acta Martyrum*. Only when Christianity revealed itself as the major threat to the empire's internal security in the 250s did administration of justice become political oppression.

NOTES

- 1 Eusebius is cited in this chapter in the edition of Kirsopp Lake (1926, 1932).
- 2 *Contra Celsum* is cited here in the edition of Chadwick (1953).
- 3 For the *Martyrium Pionii*, see Musurillo (1972).
- 4 For this association in the minds of some early Christians, see Heb. 11.32–40.
- 5 See Frend (1965: 57–8).
- 6 Petilian, cited by Augustine, 2.89.196 (martyrdom as the goal of Christian life), and compare 2.92.202 (standing persecution of the Just of Israel and Christianity by unjust rulers).
- 7 Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 16 (CSEL 20.214): 'Nos faceret aqua vocatos, sanguine electos.'
- 8 See Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 24.157 for Augustus' favour to the Jews, and also 45.356 for sacrifices in honour of Caligula.
- 9 Thus, Polycarp among very many others – Eusebius, *HE* 4.15.21.
- 10 Thus, Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 29.192: 'A glorious death in defence of the Law is a new kind of life.'
- 11 On this period see Eisenman (1997), which is over-detailed but useful.
- 12 Tacitus, *Histories* 5.5.3, largely on the grounds of their religious exclusiveness leading to alleged contempt of their pagan contemporaries.

- 13 Suetonius, *Nero*, 16.2: 'Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and wicked [*maleficus*, having the overtones of magic] superstition.'
- 14 See the excellent study by de Ste. Croix (1963).
- 15 Pliny, *Epp.* 10.96 and 97. See de Ste. Croix (1963: 18–21) and Sherwin-White (1966: 691–712).
- 16 Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.6. This is an interesting commentary on the character and effect of the Christian mission in the post-Pauline era. Perhaps, when the Last Days failed to occur, converts returned to their former pagan allegiance.
- 17 The original Latin is given by Rufinus in his translation of Eusebius, *HE* 4.9. Translated by Stevenson (1967: 21–2).
- 18 Text translated in Stevenson (1967: 110–11 [Document No. 92] and Frend (1996: 94–8).
- 19 Cited in Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 9 (c. 230); Rendall (1931).
- 20 Eusebius *HE* 4.15.26. Compare *HE* 4.15.6: 'Kill the atheists. Let Polycarp be sent for.'
- 21 Galen, (lost) *Commentary on Plato, Republic Bk. 10*. Cited from Walzer (1949: 15).
- 22 *Acta Scillitanorum*; Musurillo (1972: 86–9): 'Hodie martyres in coelis sumus . . . Deo gratias.'
- 23 Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 8.6–9 (Glover 1931) and compare *Passio Perpetuae* 16.2.
- 24 Tertullian, *Apol.* 40.2.
- 25 Spartian, *Vita Severi*, 17.1; discussed by Frend (1974: 333–51) and Barnes (1968b: 40–1).
- 26 *Passio Perpetuae* 16.4: 'By this time the adjutant (*optio*) who was head of the gaol was already a Christian'; and compare 17.2: 'many of them [sightseers at the prison] began to believe'.
- 27 Also see dal Covolo (1989: 77).
- 28 Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 9.12.14.; Pope Zephyrinus recalled Callistus from Antium and 'appointed him over the cemetery', c. 200 CE.
- 29 Tertullian, *Apol.* 49.6
- 30 For Elagabalus' unpopularity in Rome, because of his downgrading of Jupiter, see Dio Cassius, *Epitome* (LCL edn) 80.11.
- 31 His tomb with an inscription alluding to his martyrdom was found in the catacomb of Calepodius (see Frend 1996: 369, and n. 68).
- 32 Origen, *In Matth.* 24.9. *Sermo* 39 (ed. Lommatzsch 1831–48: 4.270) 'Ut tunc fiant persecutiones iam non ex parte sicut ante, sed generaliter ubique.'
- 33 For the dating, see Saumagne (1975: 29).
- 34 Cyprian, *De Lapsis* 8 (Hartel 1868: 242). Christians 'running to the forum to sacrifice'. Cf. *Ep.* 11.1 (Hartel: 495).
- 35 *Martyrdom of Pionius and his companions*, paras 4 and 15 (Musurillo 1972: 136–67). See Fox (1986: 462–92).
- 36 Cited from Stevenson (1967: 218); see Knipfing, (1923: 345ff.) and Alföldi (1938), who are still the best authorities on the Decian persecution.
- 37 See Décret and Fanjar (1981: 331–2).
- 38 Cyprian, *Ep.* 34.4 (*CSEL* 3.2, p. 571) 'divisione mensurna'.
- 39 Eusebius, *HE*, 7.11.7, 'the gods that preserve the empire'.
- 40 Cyprian, *Ep.* 77.2–3 (*CSEL* 3.2, pp. 834–5); the statement by the proconsul of Africa, Paternus, 30 August 257, after ordering Cyprian into exile, adds, 'They [the emperors] further ordain that no meetings be held in any place and that Christians shall not enter their cemeteries. If any transgress this wholesome ordinance, he shall suffer death' (*Acta Proconsularia* 1 [*CSEL* 3.3. p. cxi]. Also, Eusebius, *HE*, 7.11.4 (Egypt).
- 41 *Ep.* 80, which throws light on the exact sources of information at Cyprian's disposal in Rome.

- 42 *Acta Proconsularia* 4 (pp. cxii–cxiii): ‘Diu sacrilega mente vixisti et plurimos nefariae tibi conspirationis homines adgregasti et inimicum te diis Romanis et religionibus sacris constituisti . . . sanguine tuo sancietur disciplina.’
- 43 Cyprian, *Ep.* 80.1 (p. 840). The prefect of the City had ordered the execution of any Christian (clergy?) who was caught and the confiscation of his goods.
- 44 *Passio Sanctorum Mariani et Iacobi* 2.2: ‘blind madness of the pagans and the action of military officials’ (Musurillo 1972).
- 45 Dating discussed in Marichal (1953).
- 46 Eusebius, *HE* 7.30.21, and Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum* 6; Moreau (1954).
- 47 Eusebius, *HE* 7.15 (the case of the soldier, Marinus in Palestine). Trophimus in Asia Minor (from the museum at Brusa) is an example of a martyr in these years. See Frend (1996: 135–6).
- 48 See Frend (1952: 83–5). The evidence has not been superseded.
- 49 A good overview of these reforms remains that of Ensslin (1939).
- 50 The text of Diocletian’s edict is reproduced in Stevenson (1967: 267–8 [Document 236]).
- 51 See Frend (1987), Beatrice (1988) and Stevenson (1967 [Document 237 – extracts from Porphyry]).
- 52 Thus, the centurion Marcellus, executed at Tingis (Tangier) 31 July 298. See *Acta Marcelli* in Musurillo (1972: 250–9). Marcellus, though a Christian, was executed specifically, however, for throwing down his arms.
- 53 Eusebius-Jerome, *Chronicle*, ad. ann. 301; Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum* 11–13.
- 54 Eusebius, *HE* 8.2, 4–5 (text of edicts 1 and 2); Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum* 13.1.
- 55 See the account in *Gesta apud Zenophilum* (appendix to Optatus of Milevis, *De Schismate*, CSEL 26, pp. 186–8) and Stevenson (1967 [Document 240]).
- 56 Eusebius, *On the Martyrs of Palestine* 1.1 (Lawlor and Oulton 1954: 331–3), the martyrdom of Procopius.
- 57 For arguments, I believe mistaken, against its enforcement, see Ste. Croix (1954).
- 58 See *Acta Saturnini* PL. 8, 689–703 (particularly paras 2 and 3).
- 59 *Mart. Pal.* 3.1, but in North Africa disobedient congregations were liable to arrest.
- 60 See Duval (1982: I, 105–15).
- 61 *CIL*. Viii. 6700 = 19353.
- 62 *Passio sanctae Crispinae* (Musurillo 1972: 310–9). Discussed by Monceaux (1905: 158–61) and Rosen (1997).
- 63 Christern (1976: 297–303). For the suggestion of a Donatist connection see Frend (1996: 364).
- 64 Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 5.22 (ed. S. Brandt, CSEL xix) .
- 65 Ibid. 23; cf. ibid. 13.1: The gods ‘were decaying’ (ibid. 12).
- 66 For instance, the inscription from Arycanda in Lycia, *CIL* 3.12132 (Stevenson 1967 [Document 247]). Maximin’s answer to these petitions is given in Eusebius, *HE* 9.7.
- 67 Constantine’s vision of the Sun-god, Anon. *Panegyrici Latini* 6 (7) 21.3–6; Stevenson (1967 [Document 248]).
- 68 Ed. Zinsa, CSEL 20, 21; Frend 1952: 20.
- 69 Lactantius, *De mortibus* 48.2–12; Stevenson (1967 [Document 250]).
- 70 Sozomen, *HE* 2.9.1–5.

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GRAECO-ROMAN PHILOSOPHICAL OPPOSITION



Michael Bland Simmons

THE HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

Christianity was born and developed in a hostile environment. Though pregnant with a great deal of theological and spiritual meaning for many throughout the ages, the cross nonetheless symbolized the insoluble conflict between Christianity and paganism already present in the life and teachings of Jesus (Meyer 1992). Hostilities described in the Acts of the Apostles between Jews and Christ-followers preceded the greater conflict between the early church and gentiles in the Graeco-Roman world during the first-century missionary expansions (Freund 1984: 11–109; Chadwick 1992). The delineation of correct (orthodox) doctrines in the face of heretical teachings, and the definition of a canon of scripture, were two of the major challenges of the church beginning (but not ending) in the second century (González 1970; Pelikan 1971; Chadwick 1993: 32–83; Kelly 1978: 52–82; McDonald 1995). As these issues of identity were being clarified, both the pagan intelligentsia and the political administration of the Roman empire were able, beginning with Nero (54–68), to distinguish between Judaism and the Christ-movement as separate religious entities (Suetonius, *Caesar* 16.25; Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44; Griffin 1984; Harnack 1972). Owing to such factors as the church's continued growth in the provinces, the belief in the deity of Christ, and the exclusiveness of the Christians (which appeared strange and unacceptable to the tolerant polytheists of the empire), an increasingly inimical attitude towards Christianity became inevitable (Chadwick 1993: 66–131; Daniélou 1973). Christian leaders were now thrown on the defensive, and began to write *apologies* which had the twofold objective of offering reasonable explanations of doctrines and practices, and evangelistically attempting to convince the pagans that Christianity is the only true religion (see Chapter 21 of this volume and Freund 1984: 229–70). Thus by the second century there emerged such erudite apologists as Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and the Alexandrian theologians Clement and Origen (Kelly 1978: 83–108; Chadwick 1993: 54–115). As we shall see, the latter wrote a refutation of the first work published against Christianity, *The True Discourse* by Celsus.

Though official state persecutions of Christians had occurred as early as Nero (54–68) and Domitian (81–96), by the 250s under the emperors Decius (249–51) and

Valerian (253–60), the first universal persecutions took place, clearly indicating the perceived threat now posed by the church to the imperial *pax deorum* (Frend 1981). The latter formed the conceptual basis of the empire's religious propaganda, and because it possessed theological and political implications, it was often used as a test of the individual citizen's loyalty to the Roman government. Often given the name of *imperial cult*, it had been continuously developed and variously interpreted by Roman leaders since the time of Livy. Its central thesis posited that the right order and success of the empire would be maintained as long as the worship of the Roman gods was perpetuated. From Tertullian to Eusebius, the misfortunes which befell the empire, whether natural, economic, or military, were regularly blamed on the Christians for their refusal to worship the very gods held responsible for Rome's greatness (Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 40; *Ad Scapulam* 3; Arnobius, *Adversus nationes* 1.1; Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 9.7.3–14). The church took maximum advantage of the cessation of state persecutions between Gallienus (260) and Diocletian (284). But storm clouds soon gathered. Already by the 290s, beginning with the executions of Christians in the Roman legions (see Simmons 1995: 38–40), a very destructive two-edged sword was being prepared by the pagans for their upcoming unprecedented attack upon the church. This double threat came in the form of, first, the most damaging obloquys ever written (to date) against the Christians; and, second, the most formidable state persecution ever launched against the church in its 300-year history (Simmons 1995: 22–46; Woods 1992; Davies 1989; Barnes 1973; de Ste. Croix 1954).

Moreover, the Great Persecution which began in February 303 would not end until Constantine's victory in 311 at the Milvian Bridge in Rome and the subsequent 'Edict of Milan'.

THE CASE OF PHILOSOPHICAL OPPOSITION

Yet we must keep in mind that within this environment hostile to Christianity another kind of opposition developed. It was led by learned philosophers and communicated both in the formal debates and lectures of their schools in places like Rome, Athens, and Alexandria and in their published works which vituperated Christian beliefs and practices. Appearing for the first time in the late second century and continuing throughout the fourth, these writings served a twofold purpose. First, they contained well-reasoned arguments against such Christian doctrines as monotheism, the incarnation, Christ's deity and passion, and the resurrection of the flesh. Second, they attempted to prove the superiority of traditional polytheism and the Hellenic *paideia* upon which Graeco-Roman culture was founded.

During the period from 150–363 CE, the three philosophers whose anti-Christian works are examined in this chapter (Celsus, Sossianus Hierocles and Porphyry of Tyre), and a fourth, Julian the Apostate, an emperor with philosophical interests whom I profile in Chapter 50, contributed to this philosophical opposition to Jesus and his followers. In this chapter I shall outline the individual and collective contributions of Celsus, Sossianus Hierocles and Porphyry, consider the major

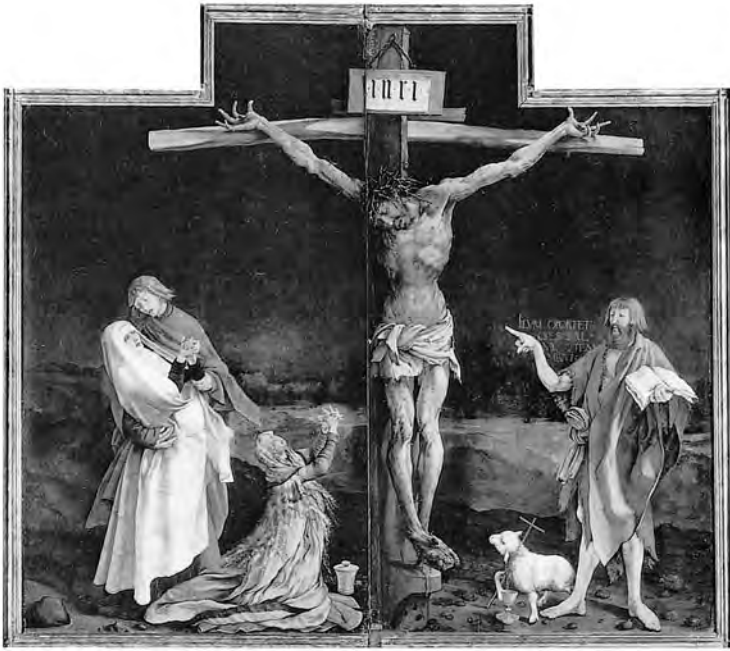


Figure 32.1 *The Crucifixion*, 1515–16, by Grünewald. Pagan philosophers rejected the Christian doctrine of the passion of Christ. Photo by permission of Oxford University Press, from McManners (1992: 2).

themes of one of the works they produced (*The True Discourse* of Celsus) and finally assess their significance for the conflict between Christianity and paganism in the Roman empire.

CELSUS

A recent study estimates that during the period in which Celsus wrote *The True Discourse* (= *Discourse*) against Christianity (c. 178 CE: see pp. 851–60), there were c. 100,000 Christians dispersed among two hundred or more communities in the empire (Hopkins 1998). A concern about the growth of the church may have been a corollary factor which motivated Celsus to write his book (Frend 1984: 310–11, 443), but the immediate cause appears to have been the need to write an erudite rejoinder to the apologies of Justin Martyr written c. 150.¹ We know nothing of Celsus beyond the pages of the *Discourse*, of which about 70% has been accurately preserved in Origen's *Contra Celsum* (Rougier 1977: 19; Hoffmann 1987: 45; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5.53). Its significance as the oldest literary attack upon Christianity by a member of the pagan intelligentsia of which details have survived reveals invaluable insight into the hostile conflict that was occurring between Christianity and paganism during our period. The central thesis of my argument in this chapter



Figure 32.2 Christ raises Lazarus, from a third-century sarcophagus. The doctrine of the resurrection of the body contradicted Platonic soteriology and eschatology and was often a focus of anti-Christian writers. Photo by permission of Oxford University Press, from McManners (1992: 21).

will stress the truculent nature of the conflict between the two religious traditions, a good illustration of the conflict-ridden character of Mediterranean culture discussed in Chapter 1 of this volume, rather than to follow the often superficial trend in modern scholarship which has explained the relationship between Christianity and paganism on the basis of intentionally worn-out, ambiguous, and anachronistic words like *pluralism* or *syncretism*. It is extremely doubtful that either side would have explained the conflict in this manner. A fresh appraisal is necessary to get a better understanding, even though it will be tantamount to swimming against the currents. The fashionable argument (pluralism/syncretism) leaves too many unanswered questions and should be no longer accepted as a viable interpretation of the problem.

Although Origen informs us that Celsus was a professed adversary of Christianity

(*Contra Celsum* 8.62; 4.47), and his erudition in pagan and Christian literature was conspicuous (*Contra Celsum* 4.11; 4.36; 2.32; 2.76), the school of philosophy which he espoused has been the focus of scholarly debate. Origen calls Celsus an Epicurean in *Contra Celsum* 1.8, but elsewhere he expresses doubt (4.54; 4.75). It has been suggested that Celsus was the Epicurean who lived in the second century to whom Lucian of Samosata dedicated his *Alexander the False Prophet*,² but passages in the *Contra Celsum* which betray either Stoic (*Contra Celsum* 4.67; Chadwick 1947) or Platonic (*Contra Celsum* 1.32; Chadwick 1947: 47; Quasten 1953: 52; Baumeister 1978) doctrines eliminate him as the anti-Christian author of the *Discourse*. It would therefore be prudent to conclude that Celsus was an unknown eclectic philosopher with strong Platonic leanings whose major focus was practical ethics rather than abstract metaphysical concepts (Chadwick 1947: 46).

Turning to the date of the *True Discourse*, Celsus (*Contra Celsum* 8.69) refers to contemporary Christians who were sought out and punished with death. This appears to be an allusion to the rescript of Marcus Aurelius which initiated the persecution of Christians at Lyons and Vienne in 177 CE (Chadwick 1953: xiv). Also, in the preface to *Contra Celsum*, Origen remarks that Celsus had been dead a long time, and this makes sense in light of Eusebius' statement (*HE* 6.36.2) that Origen wrote his refutation during Philip the Arab's reign (244–9 CE; Chadwick 1953: xxv–xxvi; Borret 1967: 15–21). Finally, a reference to joint emperors in the *Discourse* (*Contra Celsum* 8.71) again strongly suggests the period of Marcus Aurelius. It appears likely that Celsus wrote the *True Discourse against the Christians* c. 178 CE.

More difficult to answer is the question of Celsus' provenance. Suggestions have ranged from Rome to Alexandria as the place of origin for the *Discourse* (Chadwick 1953: xxviii–xxix), and it is quite possible that Celsus may have acquired knowledge of Christian heretical doctrines by attending lectures given in the schools of people like Marcion and Valentinus in Rome (Amphoux 1992: 250). However, *Contra Celsum* 7.3–11 undoubtedly reveals personal knowledge of contemporary Near Eastern prophetic practices, and this would appear to provide unambiguous evidence that Celsus most probably came from Syria (Frend 1984: 177; Burke 1984: 3).

With respect to the structure, method, and style of the *Discourse*, we first note that Books 1–3 of the *Contra Celsum* respond to the attacks of a Jew (Fox 1987: 482) – presumably a literary device used to express Celsus' views – found in the early part of the work; Books 4–5 give Celsus' criticism of the Jewish religion from which Christianity originated; Books 6–7 inform us that Celsus argued that the Christians borrowed from Greek culture, and that their religion encouraged sedition in the empire:

For Celsus has quoted several passages especially from Plato, comparing them with extracts from the holy scriptures such as could impress an intelligent person, saying that those ideas have been better expressed among the Greeks, who refrained from making exalted claims and from asserting that they had been announced by a god or the son of a god.

(*Contra Celsum* 6.1)

Some of the basic components of classical anti-Christian polemics make their appearance here: the superiority of Graeco-Roman culture, a criticism of scripture,



Figure 32.3 The beginning of John's Gospel from the Codex Sinaiticus, written in uncial script on vellum and discovered in the Monastery of St Catherine on Mount Sinai in 1844. The Christian scriptures were often ridiculed by Graeco-Roman philosophers for their inelegant style and mythological contents. Photo by permission of Oxford University Press, from McManners (1992: 21).

and a dependence upon Plato to prove the weaknesses of Christian doctrine. In Book 7 Origen responds to Celsus' concepts of demonology, divine providence, and his poignant accusation that Christianity has caused sedition against the Roman government. Noteworthy here is Celsus' silence on such topics as cannibalism, incest, infanticide, and orgies which were popular criticisms of Christianity in the second century (Fox 1987: 427). As a learned philosopher he evidently felt himself to be above the clamour of the ignorant masses. His overall method of argumentation seems to have been inspired by anti-Jewish writers like Lysimachus, Chaeremon, and Apion (Feldman 1990: 106). Moreover, if we keep in mind the important fact that it was an enemy of Celsus (Origen) who edited the *Discourse*, it is obvious that we cannot always get a clear picture of the details of his argument (Hoffmann 1987:

44). Suffice it to say that the method and style of the *Discourse* can be generally characterized by (1) the use of historical and 'scientific' facts; (2) the use of irony (often humorous); (3) deliberate distortion of his enemies' beliefs; (4) literary retortion; (5) the allegorization of (e.g.) Homer, but at the same time refusing to allow the Christians to allegorize scripture; (6) the use of Stoic and Platonic doctrines to support his argument; and (7) criticism of scripture to show the superiority of pagan culture.³ These salient features of Celsus' argument contributed to his major goal to convert the Christians 'by shaming them out of their religion' (Quasten 1953: 52).

Though Celsus emphasized the superiority of Greek culture, he nevertheless employed his knowledge of the Bible in his attack upon Christianity. It is true that Origen says that Celsus was not acquainted with the words of scripture (6.12), but this probably means that he was ignorant of the different levels of biblical interpretation (literal, moral, spiritual) used in the Alexandrian exegetical schools. Many passages in the *Discourse* quoted in the *Contra Celsum* confirm Celsus' knowledge of scripture. The question is how much of the Bible did he know? In beginning to answer this, we must remember that by 180 CE the New Testament canon had not been closed (Rougier 1977: 115–18), and we often find Celsus citing non-canonical books like the Epistle of Barnabas and the Book of Enoch (1.63; 5.54) along with canonical books. Origen is explicit that he knew Matthew (1.34) and the other gospels (6.16) very well, and many passages in the *Contra Celsum* attest to this (e.g. 1.34–8). Origen also admits that Celsus had read Genesis (4.42), and one study has demonstrated that the text he used was the Septuagint, based on the verbal agreements between it and passages of Celsus quoted in the *Contra Celsum* (Burke 1986: 242). Of the rest of the Pentateuch, the books of the Prophets, the historical and wisdom literature, the Pauline corpus, Acts, and Revelation, Celsus knew either little or nothing (Benko 1984: 148–9; Wilken 1984: 101; Burke 1986: 245; Pichler 1980: 43–50; contra Rougier 1977: 113–14).

In order to give examples of Celsus' criticism of scripture, we begin by noting his great aversion for the allegorical method of interpretation. He denounces the Christian allegorical interpretation of the Mosaic histories (1.17) because the language of Moses, particularly the Genesis account of creation, will allow no such meaning for the text (1.20). In any event, he argues, Christians give an allegorical meaning to the creation story of Gen. 2:21–2 because they are ashamed of it (4.38). Finally, this hermeneutical method produces an interpretation of scriptural passages more absurd than the fables themselves (4.51; 4.87). Often Celsus attacks the Bible by attempting to show the superiority of a philosophical doctrine, as he does in 1.19–20, where he rejects the Christian doctrine of creation (in Genesis) by saying that the world is uncreated, and here he bases his argument on the Platonic concept of the eternity of the world (*Timaeus* 22f.) combined with the Stoic doctrine of cyclical conflagrations. Another contention is that the stories of the Bible are simply invented by its writers. Thus the 'twelve legions of angels' (Matt. 26:52–4) is a fiction of the evangelists (2.10). Jesus' genealogy was made up by Matthew to make it appear that he descended from royalty (2.32). Moses and the prophets have written pure nonsense (6.50). Celsus also accentuates the inconsistencies of the Bible. For example, Jesus' injunction to turn the other cheek is an infraction of the Old Testament *lex talionis* (6.50). One Gospel says that one angel came to the tomb, another says two (5.52).

Jesus forbade his disciples to be ambitious (Mark 10:44; Matt. 20:25; Luke 22:25), which contradicts his prophecy that they would rule over the nations (7.23). Celsus also attacks the style of scripture: its language lacks the elegance of Greek literature (6.2); it is very simple and commonplace (4.87), and even vulgar (3.68). Finally, even though the writers of the Bible borrowed from the wise men of antiquity, they often misunderstood and misconstrued what they wrote (1.21; 6.7). This critique may have been provoked by Justin Martyr who wrote that God's divine Logos had been revealed to the wise men of old like Socrates. They were in a true sense 'Christians before Christ'. Origen, moreover, following one of the basic arguments of Christian apologetics (e.g., 6.43), is determined to prove that Moses' writings are much older than Homer. The borrowing went in the opposite direction.

Although Celsus overwhelmingly reviled orthodox Christianity, his knowledge extended also to heretical groups or movements of the second century (Burke 1984: 5–6). In the *Discourse* reference is made to gnostic sects, apocryphal works (e.g., the Preaching of Peter), Marcionite doctrines (especially 6.74; Fox 1987: 515; Jackson 1992), and sects founded by the women apostles Helen of Samaria, the consort of Simon Magus, Marcellina, Salome, Mariamne and Martha. Even heresies that were unknown to the learned Origen are mentioned (8.16). It appears from this that Celsus had a broad knowledge of the religion that he was assailing, and his purpose for alluding to the diverse doctrines that were disseminated in the name of Christianity is clear. By opposing the teachings of the heretics to those of the orthodox, he was able to prove the disunity, and therefore falsity, of Jesus and his followers to his readers (Martinez 1990–1: 203).

Although I will cover the themes of the *Discourse* as a case study in philosophical opposition to early Christianity later in this chapter, it is worth while at this point to make a few observations about Celsus' legacy. In the history of ancient thought, particularly as it relates to the conflict between Christianity and paganism in the Roman empire, the *True Discourse* and the *Contra Celsum* reveal the respective positions of the educated representatives of the old polytheism and the new monotheism. Celsus is important for our understanding of this conflict because he is the first learned pagan to write against Christianity, and the *Discourse* is significant for setting a precedent for later anti-Christian polemicists regarding scripture, the superiority of Graeco-Roman culture, and the use of pagan philosophy, especially Platonism, to disprove the credibility of Christian doctrine. Even though some scholars question the influence of Celsus upon later periods (Quasten 1953: 52; González 1970: 216; Hauck 1985–6), others have equally argued that many Christian writers before Origen wrote in response to the *True Discourse* (Chadwick 1953: xiii; Baumeister 1978: 175; Benko 1984: 140; Burke 1984: 1–7). While it may be true that a direct influence cannot be established in many cases, it would certainly be rash to suggest that later writers like Hierocles and Porphyry, and even a philosophically inclined emperor like Julian, had not become familiar with many of the anti-Christian themes of the *Discourse*.

SOSSIANUS HIEROCLES

Sossianus Hierocles was successively governor of the province in which Palmyra was located (c. 297), *vicarius* probably of the diocese of Oriens, *praeses* of Bithynia (303), and prefect of Egypt (310–11).⁴ By 23 February 303 when Diocletian promulgated his first edict against the Christians, Hierocles had already exerted considerable influence upon imperial officials in Nicomedia to launch the ‘Great Persecution’. Lactantius informs us that he was the author and instigator of the persecution (*De mortibus persecutorum* 16). Christians who crossed themselves at Antioch during sacrifices ordered by Diocletian before the persecution interfered with the *hauruspices*’ ascertaining the proper omens (*De mor. pers.* 10.1–5; Eusebius, *HE* 8.4.3f.), and this precipitated the imperial concilium (late 302/early 303) at Nicomedia where Diocletian, Galerius, and representatives from the government and the military met to decide what to do with the Christians. Hierocles was there persuading Diocletian to begin the persecution (Lactantius, *De mor. pers.* 11). After Diocletian consulted the oracle of Apollo at Didyma he was convinced that it was the will of the gods to initiate the persecution (Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 2.50; Lactantius, *De mor. pers.* 2.7f.; Arnobius, *Adversus nationes* 1.26; Zosimus, *Historia nova* 2.12 and 2.36f.).

It may have been just before the outbreak of the persecution that Hierocles wrote the *Philaethes* (*Lover of Truth*), although this is debatable, and some scholars date it to c. 311–13 (Barnes 1976: 240–3 and 1981: 22; Forrat and Des Places 1986: 18, 23; Des Places 1989). However, an attempt to explain the contradictory descriptions of the *Philaethes* found in Lactantius and Eusebius, who were contemporaries of Hierocles and were familiar with his work, may help to solve the problem. Lactantius is explicit that Hierocles wrote the *Philaethes* not *against*, but *to* the Christians (Lactantius, *Div. inst.* 5.2). Eusebius offers a different interpretation, referring to the work written ‘against us’ (*Contra Hieroclem* 1: *kath’ hēmōn*). Hierocles may have published two editions, one which possessed a more conciliatory tone (c. 303) to which Lactantius refers; and a later edition with an overt hostile message, perhaps when Hierocles was prefect of Egypt (310–11). Eusebius’ description ‘against us’ may refer to this later edition. Whether there were indeed two editions, it is clear that from c. 303 the *Philaethes* was circulating in the Eastern provinces. Hierocles draws his materials from *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* which was written by Philostratus (c. 217) at the demand of Septimius Severus’ wife, Julia Domna.⁵ Apollonius appears to have been an ascetic who lived during the first century, but by Philostratus’ period a rich hagiographic tradition had already developed, and it is for this reason that the latter makes him not only a Greek hero but a wonder-working holy-man possessed with divine qualities (Forrat and Des Places 1986: 53f.). Hierocles’ *Philaethes* undoubtedly depended on earlier anti-Christian sources, and Celsus is a good possibility. Eusebius himself admits that Origen in the *Contra Celsum* had so sufficiently answered Hierocles’ criticisms that he only needed to focus on Hierocles’ comparison of Jesus and Apollonius (*Contra Hieroclem* 1; Junod 1988: 41). Even though it was written hastily in the midst of controversy and is therefore lacking in style and orderly argumentation, the *Contra Hieroclem* is a book-by-book criticism of the work of Philostratus⁶ as it was used by Hierocles (Eusebius, *C. Hier.* 1). It would

appear that the *Philaethes* was not published for the public, which may explain why it had apparently little influence upon later writers.

Nor can we describe Hierocles as a philosopher occupied with speculative thought. None the less, it would be rash to discount the importance of the *Philaethes*. First, this work reveals significant information about the intellectual background to the pagan-Christian conflict during the period immediately before the outbreak of the Great Persecution. Second, it reveals the close association between pagan intellectuals and the anti-Christian policies of the Tetrarchy (Simmons 1995: 24–46). Third, it is significant for the historical development of pagan and Christian apologetics and polemics as literary genres in the late Roman empire. Fourth, it gives us some understanding about the development in the history of comparative religions. Next, it helps us to understand the evolving concept of the 'Holy Man' in ancient Mediterranean society. Finally, it demonstrates the importance that both sides of the conflict placed upon such religious concerns as miracles and prophecy (Kertsch 1980; Gallagher 1982: 165–6). Note that after mentioning Apollonius, Hierocles informs us of his purpose for writing:

What then is my reason for mentioning these facts? It was in order that you may be able to contrast our own accurate and well-established judgment on each point, with the easy credulity of the Christians. For whereas we reckon him who wrought such feats not a god, but only a man pleasing to the gods, they on the strength of a few miracles proclaim their Jesus a god.

(Eusebius, *C. Hier.* 2)

In these lines we have the heart of Hierocles' message: (1) Jesus is not God, and (2) the basis of Christian faith cannot be proven. By constructing an argument that employs the same method of literary retortion which Porphyry used in his *Contra Christianos*, it is noteworthy that Eusebius says very little about Jesus and Christianity in general, and rather attacks Hierocles by using his weapons against him. Its main themes are Apollonius, Jesus and his disciples, miracles (including healings and exorcisms), fideism, prophecy, and Fate and Free Will.

PORPHYRY OF TYRE

Originally given the Semitic name Malchos ('King') after his father,⁷ Porphyry was born in the Phoenician city of Tyre in c. 232 CE.⁸ By c. 250 he came to Caesarea in Palestine where for a period he probably studied biblical exegesis and hermeneutics, particularly the Alexandrian allegorical method of interpretation, under Origen.⁹ Porphyry may have been a Christian during this time, and it may have been while he was in Caesarea that he was assaulted by a group of Christian youths (Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.23.37), which may have initiated the development of a great hatred for Christianity and eventually gained for him a reputation as a 'defensor simulacrorum' (F. Maternus, *De err. prof. relig.* 13.4). Sometime later Porphyry went to Athens where he studied philology and philosophy under Longinus. Here the critical linguistic, literary, rhetorical, and historical skills were developed that he would later successfully use against the Christians (Eunapius, *Vitae philosophorum*

456). Such works as the *Philosophia ex oraculis*, the *Epistle to Anebo*, and the *De antro nympharum* belong to this period.¹⁰ In 263 Porphyry left Athens for Rome, where he became the disciple of Plotinus and studied in his Neoplatonic school there. After a period of time in the city Porphyry became suicidal, and his master advised him to go on holiday (268). He went to Sicily (Eusebius, *HE* 6.19; *Vit. Plot.* 4, 11) and while there took at least one trip to North Africa to do zoological research for the *De abstinentia*, and may have begun a Neoplatonic school in Africa Proconsularis (Simmons 1995: 29, n. 310). Plotinus died in 270, and Porphyry returned to Rome to assume leadership in the Neoplatonic school. Late in life he married a widow with seven children named Marcella, and informs us that at around sixty-eight years of age he had a mystical experience similar to those of his master (*Vit. Plot.* 23; Simmons 1995: 219, nn. 24–5). He completed the edition of the *Enneads* before his death, which occurred sometime around 305.

Porphyry appears to have had a significant influence upon the events at Diocletian's court which led to the outbreak of the Great Persecution in February 303. In his *Epistle to Marcella* (Ch. 4) he alludes to an important trip to the East because, he says, of 'a need of the Greeks', which took place around the time that Diocletian and Galerius were devising a programme for the persecution. Lactantius informs us that a 'priest of philosophy' who taught abstinence and wrote three books against the Christians dined regularly at Diocletian's palace in Nicomedia (*Div. inst.* 5.2). This is undoubtedly a reference to Porphyry, who in the *De abstinentia* calls the philosopher 'a priest of the Supreme God' (*Abst.* 2.49.1), and the three books allude to the anti-Christian *Philosophia ex oraculis*. Porphyry was probably in attendance at the same imperial consilium that Hierocles and other magistrates attended in late 302. Porphyry was the ideal person to attend the meeting, and Diocletian will have listened intently to his advice about the impending persecution. He was the leading scholar of his day, concerned both about the decline of pagan culture and the increasing number of intellectuals going over to the church. He was the most famous anti-Christian activist who had already published several works against Christianity. As we noted above, the *Philosophia ex oraculis* contained a number of oracles against the Christians, and in the *Ad Marcellam* he stated that the greatest expression of piety was to honour the gods according to ancestral customs. Porphyry also believed in the superiority of Graeco-Roman culture to the man-made ludicrous fables of the Christians. All of these will have admirably suited Diocletian's policies against the Christians (*Ad Marc.* 18). Arnobius of Sicca, the first Christian author to write in response to Porphyry, provides evidence that the anti-Christian works of Porphyry were circulating in the western Roman empire by the late third century, as I have argued elsewhere (1995), which probably resulted from Porphyry's trip to Africa Proconsularis, and this may indeed indicate that Diocletian supported the dissemination of Porphyrian anti-Christian propaganda in association with the official imperial legislation of the Great Persecution (Beatrice 1988).

Porphyry was a polymath whose scholarly interests led him to study history, philosophy, religion, the natural and medical sciences, philology, and rhetoric.¹¹ He wrote perhaps between 66–81 works, and three of these are particularly important: the *Contra Christianos*, *Philosophia ex oraculis*, and *De regressu animae*. The *Contra Christianos* was a systematic attack in 15 books against Christian scripture, which

provoked responses from Arnobius, Methodius, Eusebius, Apollinaris, Philostorgius, Firmicus Maternus, Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Didymus the Blind, John Chrysostom, Severian, Cyril, Jerome and, of course, Augustine. The latter admired Porphyry for his scholarly qualities, and he was highly respected in North Africa in his time (Augustine, *Civ. Dei* 7.25; 8.12; 10.10; 10.28; 10.29; 10.31). The *Contra Christianos* posed such a threat to the church that Constantine's edict of 333 refers to the Arians as 'Porphyrians' (Socrates, *HE* 1.9.30; *Codex Theodosianus* 15.5.66), and an edict issued in February 448 by Theodosius II and Valentinian III ordered all copies of it to be put to the flames (*Codex Justinianus* 1.1.3).¹² Surviving fragments are found only in Christian writings. The *Philosophia ex oraculis* was a collection of oracles which offered a Chaldaean-Neoplatonic soteriology, and the *De regressu animae* was a philosophical work about the ascent of the soul to God.

THE THEMES OF THE *TRUE DISCOURSE* OF CELSUS

The final section of this chapter consists of a discussion of the themes of the *True Discourse* of Celsus, both because of the importance of this text in founding the tradition of philosophical opposition to Christianity and for its approach and contents, which were regularly utilized by later pagan critics.

Jesus

The brunt of Celsus' attack focused upon the person and works of Jesus Christ principally to disprove his deity. Philosophically the incarnation is impossible because this compromises the (Platonic) doctrine of divine immutability (Chadwick 1966: 101; Pelikan 1971: 14; Wallis 1972: 101). Rejecting the virgin birth as a fable invented by Jesus himself (*Contra Celsum* 1.28), the Jew of Book 1 explains his birth as the result of Mary's adultery with a Roman soldier named Panthera (1.39). Anyway, if Jesus was really God, why was he forced to escape to Egypt (1.66)? True divinity, moreover, does not possess physical characteristics: God cannot have been enclosed in Jesus' body, eaten food, or spoken with a voice (1.69–70). Besides, why did God have to *descend* in the first place? To learn what goes on in the world? Does he not know all things (4.3)? The incarnation is not only illogical, it is also unnecessary. God did not have to breathe his spirit into a womb, full of pollution, because he could have simply created a body for Jesus. More people would have believed in him because of his immediate existence from above (6.73). Underlying Celsus' attack upon the incarnation here is Platonic soteriology which affirmed the affinity of the soul with God, disparaged corporeal and material existence, and placed first priority on purifying one's inner being with philosophy. Life in a physical body was depreciated and hence shameful. Even so, the Christian doctrine was rejected for its particularity: why did God send his son to an obscure corner of earth to live as a Jew (6.78)? Finally, by relocating God the incarnation would disrupt the natural order of things foreordained by providence (4.5).

To disprove the deity of Christ required an explanation of his miracles which were recorded in scripture. Celsus does not deny the fact of Jesus' miracles, but rather

concentrates on the means by which they were performed. Perhaps influenced by rabbinical sources, Celsus attributes Jesus' miracles to his great skills as a magician (8.9).¹³ By associating magic with ignorance and immorality (Gallagher 1982: 43–6), Celsus could prove to the educated classes of the empire that Jesus, who had learned sorcery in Egypt, and his followers, were deceived persons from the lowest classes of society (2.52–3; Kee 1986: 121–3). Magic cannot deceive true philosophers, who are educated and moral (6.41). But Jesus' magic was not just a result of innocence or naivety. His intentions were quite malicious and hypocritical because, although he performed miracles by sorcery, he excluded others from his kingdom who did (1.6). The miracles have nothing to do with God, therefore, nor do they benefit mankind (1.6; 1.46; 2.8; 2.9; 2.14; 2.48–9; 2.51). Origen's response is that magicians do not call their audience to a reformation of character (1.38; 1.68).

As the first writer of antiquity who criticized the central figure of Christianity, Celsus moved beyond the incarnation and miracles to discredit the belief in the deity of Christ. Origen informs us that many times in the *Discourse* Celsus assailed the life of Jesus as being the most infamous (7.56). Again, the central point was to prove that Jesus was a mere man (3.41). He asks how could Jesus really be God when he tried to escape from the Jews disgracefully, was betrayed by his own disciples, and could not even save himself on the cross (2.9)? Why did Jesus, though challenged, not manifest any visible sign in the temple that he was God's son? Relying upon the belief in the superiority of the Graeco-Roman religious *mos maiorum* which affirmed that 'older is better', Celsus criticized the recent appearance of this 'God' in history (1.26). The moral turpitude of Jesus' character was a salient feature of Celsus' obloquy: Christ obtained his living, he says, in a shameful and importunate manner (1.62); God hated him for his sorcery (1.71; on John 13:8 and Luke 22:37); he deluded a few Jews into following him (2.4), and they were men of worthless character (2.4; 2.6; 2.22; 2.39; 2.45–6). The crux of Celsus' argument here was important in the intellectual debates about the nature of the God-man in antiquity who was conceived as a person with an upright moral character whose miracles bestowed good things upon humanity. Because Jesus deceived people by sorcery, possessed a base character, and could only win over to his deceptive cause the lowest classes of society, in Celsus' mind he could not be given the title *God*, *Son of God*, or even *great man* (1.57; 2.33; 2.41–2; 2.76). And in order to strike at the foundation of Christian beliefs about Jesus (scripture), Celsus says that either the gospels were corrupted from their original meaning and rewritten to answer refutations (2.26–7); or that Jesus himself borrowed from, and perverted, the wisdom of Greek philosophy (6.16; 7.58). Celsus does not, however, leave his criticism at the historical level. Inquiring about the relevance of Christianity to contemporary society, he asks why does Jesus not prove his deity now? Why is he not recognized by those (the Jews) who have been looking for their Messiah? Why do many people not believe in Jesus if indeed he came to earth as God (7.35; 2.74–5; 2.78)? Finally, to the amazement of Origen, Celsus argued that not only was Jesus bad, he was also an evil demon:

Do you see, my excellent man, that anyone who stands by your daemon not only blasphemes him, but proclaims his banishment from every land and sea, and after

binding you who have been dedicated to him like an image takes you away and crucifies you; but the demon or, as you say, the Son of God, takes no vengeance on him? This reply might have been effective if we used such words as he has put into our mouth; and yet not even on his own premisses did he speak correctly, since he said that the Son of God is a daemon.

(*Discourse 8.39*)

Divine impassibility was a basic theological tenet of the kind of Middle Platonism espoused by Celsus (Pelikan 1971: 189; Gallagher 1982: 150; Borret 1984: 177–9), and thus the doctrine of the crucifixion which posited that Christ's death was efficacious for the salvation of all humanity was attacked vehemently by Celsus. We may give five major criticisms. First, since Jesus died the ignominious death of a criminal on a cross, he certainly was not God (2.5). Many robbers have died on crosses, he says, so why should we not call them 'God' (2.44, 47)? By stripping Christ's death of its theological interpretation, Celsus concluded that Jesus was sentenced by the Jews as one deserving of death (2.10). Second, the disciples betrayed Jesus at his death (2.11–12). Next, Jesus neither received help from God, nor was he able to save himself from the cross (1.54; 2.34; 2.72). To prove his deity Jesus should have disappeared from the cross (2.68). Fourth, a true God feels no pain, and in any event, what father would allow his son's torture (8.41; 2.37; 2.23)? Opposing gnostic with orthodox views of Christ's passion, Celsus will venture to say that Jesus only appeared to suffer on the cross (2.25). Finally, Celsus finds it strange, even if the crucifixion story is accepted, that those who were responsible for Jesus' execution received no punishment from God (8.39, 41). The notion of the 'suffering of God' contradicted the Platonic doctrine of divine impassibility. Moreover, by basing the premises of his argument on the view that the Passion narratives in the gospels were inventions (2.10; 2.24; 2.43; 2.59), Celsus can conclude that the story of the cross concerns the death of a man who was a criminal (2.16).

Celsus had a special disdain for the resurrection of Christ. Owing to the Platonic doctrine of the dichotomy between soul and body, Celsus finds bodily resurrection philosophically impossible. It would have been impossible for God to receive back Jesus' spirit after being contaminated by contact with a body (6.72). As we have seen, Jesus only appeared to die, but he later reappeared, and by the use of sorcery deceived an insane woman and others with good imaginations to believe that he had been raised from the dead (2.55; 2.56; 2.60). Anyway, if the story had been true, Jesus as God should have appeared to all men universally (2.63; 2.67; 2.70). In reality Jesus could not open his own tomb (5.52; 5.58).

His conclusion strikes at the heart of Christian faith: no one has been raised from the dead with a body (2.56–7), the resurrection story is a myth (2.58), and the Christians therefore worship a dead man (7.36). People become Christians because of a false hope in Jesus' resurrection (2.54–5).

Another criticism of Celsus is associated with his belief that the exploits of the Greek heroes are superior to the miracles of Jesus (1.67). During this period both pagans and Christians believed in miracles (Dodds 1965: 84). Although Jesus performed miracles by magic for evil purposes (1.68), Celsus insists that many who

lived before the founder of Christianity performed wonders and foretold the future for the benefit of humanity. Asclepius, Cleomedes, the Dioscuri, Hercules, and Dionysus are a few examples (3.3; 3.22). Besides, Aristaeus of Proconnesus, Abaris the Hyperborean, and the Clazomenian are much better candidates for divinity than Jesus (3.26–9; 3.31; 3.32). The glorious deaths of such great ones as Hercules, Asclepius, Orpheus, Anaxarchus, and the Sibyl are superior to the ignoble demise of Jesus (7.53, 55). If Asclepius heals, gives predictions, and does good to humanity (3.24), there is no room in Graeco-Roman religion for a deceiving magician who deluded the ignorant masses.

God

One of the greatest weaknesses of Christianity for Celsus was the concept of a God who constantly changed his mode of being, since this idea contradicted the classical Platonic doctrine of divine immutability:

I have nothing new to say, but only ancient doctrines. God is good and beautiful and happy, and exists in the most beautiful state. If then He comes down to men, He must undergo change, a change from good to bad, from beautiful to shameful, from happiness to misfortune, and from what is best to what is most wicked. Who would choose a change like this? It is the nature only of a mortal being to undergo change and remoulding, whereas it is the nature of an immortal being to remain the same without alteration. Accordingly, God could not be capable of undergoing this change.

(*Discourse 4.14*)

We have already seen how this concept relates to Celsus' argument about the crucifixion, but now it is necessary to observe how it relates to creation. Celsus relied on Marcionite teaching which distinguished between a Superior God and an inferior God in several passages where he calls the creator God of the Old Testament an 'accursed divinity' (6.28; 6.29; 6.51; 6.53; 6.59; Chadwick 1966: 26).

According to Plato in the *Timaeus*, the creation of mortal beings who descend into the World of Becoming is the work of the Demiurge. Following this Academic doctrine, Celsus punctiliously disparages the stories of creation in Genesis (4.38; 4.39; 4.52–3; 4.54–6). Christian teaching about a heavenly creator thus is a perversion of the *Timaeus* account which resulted from the biblical writers' borrowing from Plato (6.19; Baumeister 1978: 163–4; Borret 1984: 185–7). To the Christian views Celsus opposes the Platonic doctrines of the eternity of the world, and the Stoic concept of cyclical periods in time characterized by intermittent conflagrations (4.11; 4.65; 4.67–9).

Teleology was an important aspect of the pagan-Christian debate about the nature of God and his relationship to the natural world (de Andrés Hernansanz 1976; Lanata 1987: 36). Celsus ridicules the Judaeo-Christian belief that God created the world for man (4.74). He asks how can anyone believe that man is superior to animals? They are intelligent (4.78–81; 4.81–5: ants and bees), they converse and possess reason (4.84), and are more beloved by God (4.97). Divine providence has allocated a proper place for humans and animals, but man cannot claim superiority

over any other species in the world (4.99). Nor can man even boast of a better knowledge of God. Celsus bases his argument on Roman augury and divination and asseverates that serpents and eagles have the power of sorcery (4.86), birds can predict future events (4.88), and elephants are observant of oaths (4.88).

With respect to God's nature, again Celsus adopts the standard teaching of the Academy: 'Ultimate being, colourless, formless, and impalpable, visible only to the mind that is guide of the soul, round which is the species of true knowledge' (6.19). This quotation from Plato demonstrates that Celsus' understanding of God is permeated with a distinct apophatic meaning, and may be one reason for his abhorrence of Christian doctrines like the incarnation, divine intervention in human affairs, and the ridiculous concept of God's chosen people. Hence God is unspeakable (7.43). He has neither mouth nor voice (6.62), He has no form, colour, nor does he partake of motion or substance (6.64). God cannot be reached by word, nor expressed by nature (6.65). He is incorporeal and impassible (6.64–5; 8.49). It is impossible to say, as Genesis 2 maintains, that God created man in his image because God is dissimilar to any other species of visible things (6.63). Yet the soul needed salvation. Following Platonic soteriology which emphasized the need to purify the soul and flee the passions of corporeal existence, Celsus affirms that man 'ought never to forsake God at all, neither by day nor by night, neither in public nor in private. In every word and deed . . . let the soul be continually directed towards God' (8.63). There was already by the second century a development in philosophy towards a rational monotheism which attempted to accommodate the old polytheism (Chadwick 1953: xvi–xxii). While rejecting the new monotheism of Christianity, Celsus insists that it makes no difference if we call the One God Zeus, Zen, Adonai, or Sabaoth (5.41–5; Baumeister 1978: 163–4; Hovland 1984: 202; Bregman 1984). This concept of the One true God, who is transcendent, conceived apophatically, and approachable only through rational thought, forms an essential part of Celsus' central thesis: there has been handed down a True Doctrine from ancient times which is the foundation of Graeco-Roman civilization, and it has given to mankind a true understanding of God's nature.

Prophecy

By 150 CE the Christian apologetic tradition had already developed a cogent argument based on the belief that Christianity must be true because Jesus Christ fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah (Hauck 1989: 137). Prophetic revelation, whether oral or written, was thought to reveal a divine, secret, and beneficial knowledge accessible only to a few qualified recipients (MacMullen 1984: 25; Hauck 1989: 137). The *argument from prophecy* was central to the pagan-Christian conflict during our period (150–363), and we know of a few pagan philosophers, such as Justin Martyr (*Dialogue* 8) and Theophilus of Antioch (*Ad Autolychum* 1.14), who were so convinced by it that they converted to Christianity. Both Christians and pagans believed in their respective prophetic traditions, and each in turn attempted to prove the falsity of their opponents positions.

Origen's argument, which followed second-century apologetics, maintained that the Old Testament prophets were inspired by the One true God, they spoke the

truth, preceded the wise men of Greece, were men of honourable characters, and their prophecies have come true in the life and death of Jesus Christ (7.4–42). Celsus ridicules the idea of a particular revelation, bases his argument on Stoic premises, and vehemently attacks the Christian ‘fulfilled prophecy’ argument (2.30; 3.1; 4.28; 7.36). His primary objective was to disprove the deity of Christ based on Old Testament prophecies. We may give five points of his argument.

First, Celsus maintains that the Old Testament prophecies are illogical and contradictory. This became an important theme in classical anti-Christian polemics, influencing later writers like Porphyry and Julian. Celsus says that the prophecies depict God as favouring evil (7.13). The prediction that the Jews will fill the earth and slay their enemies is ridiculous (7.19). Concerning the contradictions of the prophets, he asks if they really foretold that the son of the same Hebrew God would come into the world, how could he command one law through Moses and a different one through Jesus? Either he forgot what he had told Moses, or changed his mind with Jesus (7.18; 7.20; 7.25).

Second, Celsus rejects the claim that Jesus fulfilled Old Testament Messianic prophecies primarily because they can easily be applied to many other men more credible than Jesus (1.57; 2.28), they are inconsistent with the character of God (7.15–7), and they are more suitable to events other than those of Jesus’ life (1.50). In any event, if the prophecies were so clearly fulfilled in Jesus, why have the Jews not received him as their Messiah (1.52)? Philosophically the heart of Celsus’ argument here is based on Stoic epistemology, which held that reality is material and knowledge is derived from sense-perception. Inasmuch as Christian *prophetic revelation* was produced by sense-perception, it was carnal, unreliable, and certainly not divine (7.33–40; Hauck 1988: 242–9 and 1989: 121–9).

Celsus’ third point is that Jesus himself was not a prophet. Miracles and prophecy were signs of genuine divine power in Graeco-Roman religions, and consequently Celsus attempts to discredit Jesus as a wonder-working prophet (Kolenkow 1987). Christ did not foreknow all that happened to him (2.13). The prophecies about Judas and Peter at the Last Supper are ludicrous (2.19): a man who banquets with a god will not plot against him (2.21)! And even if the fictions about Jesus’ foreknowledge are accepted as true (2.15), one must keep in mind that Jesus deceived people by sorcery to believe that he was the one predicted by the Old Testament prophets (3.1).

Not only does Celsus attempt to destroy the credibility of Christian prophetic revelation, he also demonstrates the superiority of pagan oracles. Civilization, he asserts, has benefited greatly from oracles given at Delphi, Dodonna, Clarus, and other sites throughout the empire’s history (7.3). As a result of obeying the commands of these oracles, many have been miraculously healed, magnificent cities have been built, colonies were established, rulers have prospered, and barren women have given birth (*Contra Celsum* 8.45). Furthermore, the oracular responses were given by priests and priestesses who were under divine influence (8.45). To some of these the gods appeared in visible form (8.45). Conversely, it is historical fact that those who disregarded the oracles have brought divine disfavour on themselves, causing entire cities to perish and individuals to suffer (8.45).

Celsus’ fifth point is very significant for our study here and in relation to Porphyry

and Julian as well. In *Contra Celsum* 7.9, Celsus derides *contemporary* prophetic experiences in Syria:

As Celsus professes to describe the style of prophecy in Phoenicia and Palestine as though he had heard it and had a thorough first-hand knowledge of it, let us also consider this . . . There are many, he says, who are nameless, who prophesy at the slightest excuse for some trivial cause both inside and outside temples; and there are some who wander about begging and roaming around cities and military camps; and they pretend to be moved as if giving some oracular utterance. It is an ordinary and common custom for each to say: 'I am God (or a son of God, or a divine Spirit). And I have come. Already the world is being destroyed. And you, O men, are to perish because of your iniquities. But I wish to save you. And you shall see me returning again with heavenly power. Blessed is he who has worshipped me now! But I will cast everlasting fire upon all the rest, both on cities and on country places. And men who fail to realize the penalties in store for them will in vain repent and groan. But I will preserve for ever those who have been convinced by me.' Then after that he says: Having brandished these threats they then go on to add incomprehensible, incoherent, and utterly obscure utterances, the meaning of which no intelligent person could discover; for they are meaningless and nonsensical, and give a chance for any fool or sorcerer to take the words in whatever sense he likes.

Note Origen's remark about first-hand knowledge, the reference to many of these Syrian prophets during the period (late second century), and the apparent continuation of the (Christian) *charismata* mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, especially prophecy and glossolalia (Aune 1983: 359, n. 221). And even though Origen attests to a few in the third-century church who possessed prophetic gifts, he nonetheless rejects the claim that prophets similar to those of the Old Testament lived in Celsus' day (7.8–9). Celsus' principal purpose in mocking these fanatical practices was to show how contemporary Christian prophets deceived weak people just as their leader had done in Palestine many years before (Chadwick 1953: 406, n. 6 and 1966; Gillespie 1978).

Eschatology

The Christian belief that the future life of blessedness is reserved only for those who live according to Christ's teaching was greatly ridiculed by Celsus (3.81). Doctrines concerning the blessed life and communion with God are vain hopes (3.80), and the biblical writers borrowed the idea of heaven as the soul's eternal resting place from Homer and Plato (7.28). Origen retorts that these borrowed the idea from Moses and the prophets. Celsus did believe in life after death, for as a Platonist his eschatological soteriology affirmed the belief in the immortality of the soul, the ability of philosophy to purify the soul, the need to escape from corporeal contamination, a release from the cycles of reincarnation, and being with God in the afterlife (Simmons 1995: 264–303). Where Celsus parts company with the Christians is the doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh. Platonism could teach a final salvation *in*

and *from* the body, but never, as Christians professed, *of* the body. The resurrection of the body is philosophically impossible. God indeed may give immortality to the soul, but he will not raise to life flesh which is, as Heraclitus taught, more worthless than dung (5.14). Finally, calling the Christian God a 'cook', Celsus mocks the belief in an eternal hell where all except the Christians will burn with fire (5.15–17). The Christians again borrowed this from Homer, he says, and besides, more noble doctrines about eternal punishments are found in the Mystery Religions (8.39–40; 8.48). Furthermore, the idea of hell is used by Christians to scare people into becoming believers in Jesus. Christian eschatology is untenable because it is philosophically deficient in the 'true doctrine' of cyclical time – the same things happen and God does not amend his work anew – and the correct theodicy which posits that the same number of evils remain constant in the world at all times.

Jesus' followers: the church

Celsus has much to criticize about the church. To cast aspersions on the origins of Christianity, and its doctrines and practices, he uses a Jew (1.28). And although he finds the Jews contemptible for having forsaken polytheism and for other reasons (1.2; 1.14; 1.16; 1.22; 2.4; 3.6; 4.31; 4.33–5; 4.36; 5.6–9; 5.50; 5.59),¹⁴ at least they worship according to their ancestral customs (5.25–6; 5.34–5). On the other hand, Christians revolted from Hebrew traditions and became apostates (5.33). Celsus' objective in assailing the Jews was to show that Christianity must not be true because it derived from the false religion of the Hebrews (1.22). Connected with the charge of apostasy is the allegation that Christians hold secret associations which violate Roman law (1.1; 1.3; 1.7; 8.17; 8.39).¹⁵ Christianity therefore is an illegal religion.

Throughout the *Contra Celsum* Origen informs us that his opponent consistently attacked the doctrines of the church. Celsus primarily argues that Christianity is based on a corruption of the True Doctrine passed down from ancient times by ignorant and superstitious men who misunderstood what they had received (5.65; cf. 3.79). Comparing Christian teaching with the silly theriomorphic religion of Egypt (3.17, 19, 21), Celsus concludes that it is vulgar, unreasonable, and it easily persuades the illiterate masses (1.27). He will also rather frequently stress the variety of heretical doctrines circulating in the church to prove the disunity of the Christians. If they really possessed the truth, should they not all profess the same beliefs (5.62; 5.63–5; 6.30; 6.33–5; 6.38; 7.53)? Many Christian doctrines resulted from the corruption of ancient Greek authors, especially Plato (6.17–18; 7.14; 7.61). It is therefore not surprising for Celsus to find inconsistencies in such teachings as cosmology (6.49), soteriology (6.68–9), pneumatology (7.45; 6.70; 6.71; 6.72), and universalism.

As a Platonic philosopher who emphasized the importance of living in accordance with reason, Celsus regularly attacks Christian faith, and this eventually developed into a major criticism in pagan polemics by the time of Porphyry. Hence he says that men should follow reason to acquire wisdom which comes from the World of Being after the soul is purified by philosophy. Otherwise opinions from the World of Becoming will impede his attainment of the truth. Because Christians follow

opinions, they are ignorant and easily deceived (1.9). Wisdom is thus foolishness to those who say 'only believe', and 'don't ask any questions' (6.12). Christians believe erroneous and make-believe doctrines about Jesus because they cannot offer any sound reason for their 'faith' (1.13; 3.39; 4.11; 6.10; 6.12). Inasmuch as faith is inferior to reason, it is no wonder to Celsus that ignorant people are easily converted (6.12).

The new religion begun by a Jewish carpenter's son has borrowed many things from the Greeks and lacks the authority of antiquity. 'For Celsus it is axiomatic that nothing can be both new and true' (Chadwick 1966: 23). The novelty of Christianity was a major criticism of Christianity found frequently in the *Discourse* (7.53; 8.12; 8.41; 8.43). Celsus' central thesis is the belief in an ancient doctrine passed down by wise men of old which contains the True Doctrine for humanity and has had a great civilizing influence upon the Mediterranean world. Without a foundation in truth, Christian worship and ritual are demonic in origin, and worse than the practices of barbarian nations (1.5; 1.6; 1.8; 6.40; 7.62; 7.68; 8.13; 8.48).

The character and social status of Christians is the final criticism of the church made by Celsus. He maintains that Jesus' disciples were notorious and wicked (1.62), and contemporary believers are ignorant, unintelligent, carnal, and win over no one to their cause who is wise or prudent (3.44–9; 7.39). Only low-class persons of the markets who are easily deceived by sorcery, and who would never associate with cultured people, are converted to Christianity (3.50–4). The church welcomes 'sinners' because it cannot appeal to the righteous (3.65).

Christians and the Roman empire

A disregard for the True Doctrine passed down from antiquity which has preserved polytheistic culture can only lead to rebellion against the empire. Traditional polytheism is justified according to the divine providence which governs all things through the mediation of angels, demons, and heroes. To these are assigned various geographical areas, so whoever worships God should also worship his subordinate powers (7.68–70; cf. 5.25). Christians cause sedition against the Roman government in the same way that the Hebrews originated in rebellion against Egypt (3.8; cf. 3.5, 7, 14). The Christians' rebellion against the empire stems from refusing to honour the daemons in the lower atmosphere who belong to God (8.2), assist him in governing the world in their assigned territories (8.33–5), receive sacrifices and prayers (8.24–7), and bless those under their care in conjunction with providence (8.7, 9, 34, 36, 38). History informs us that many have become sick, mad, or committed suicide for disregarding polytheistic worship (8.45).

If Christians honoured these polytheistic customs, they would be tolerated (8.12), but since they worship a dead man who only recently lived, and who was the leader of a seditious movement (8.14), they revolt without reason from the common belief (8.49; cf. 8.2). Christianity divides the 'Kingdom of God', raises factions, and worships one who is God's enemy (8.11). If on the other hand the Romans abandoned their ancestral religious customs, their world would disintegrate because it is the worship of the gods that made the empire great (8.69). All people should swear by the emperor, for the material and spiritual fortunes from the gods come through

him (8.63, 66, 67, 68, 71). Christians should support the emperor to maintain justice (8.73); serve in the army to defend their country (8.74); and hold public offices in the government for the maintenance of the laws and the support of religion (8.74–5). But since they stand aloof from the government, the military, and society generally, they provoke the gods' wrath and anarchy, and should therefore be executed and driven to extinction (8.56).¹⁶

The superiority of Greek culture

As we have already observed, Celsus believed that Jesus and his followers borrowed many of their doctrines from the wise men of the Greeks who passed down the True Doctrine to posterity. This cultural *mos maiorum* contained the truth in such areas as philosophy, religion, and literature, its claim to authority was found in its antiquity, and it has formed the basis for the high culture (*paideia*) of the Greeks. It has preserved Roman civilization. Celsus goes further, however, by explaining the affinities between Christianity and Graeco-Roman culture on the basis not only of the new borrowing from the old, but also of corrupting the *Discourse* by the use of sorcery. Hence there may be found a few admirable things about Christianity, but on the whole, because of its ludicrous practices and doctrines, this new and strange religion is greatly inferior to the traditional polytheism of the empire.

Celsus initially develops his argument by saying that Greek culture is superior to the customs of barbarian nations (1.2). Since Christianity has much in common with barbarous customs, it too is inferior to Greek culture. Owing to its style and accuracy, Greek literature is superior to Christian scripture (6.1). And many of the writings of the Greeks are more ancient than those of Moses and the prophets (7.31). Celsus consistently relies upon Plato to prove his thesis (6.6–8). For example, he says that Plato taught many great theological truths, yet he never espoused a belief in a particular God who descended to earth to talk with him (6.8). Plato is a more effective teacher of the problems of theology. Quoting *Timaeus* 28C, Celsus says, 'Now to find the Maker and Father of this universe is difficult, and after finding him it is impossible to declare him to all men' (6.42). Greek philosophers have demonstrated that God is knowable by synthesis, analysis, and analogy, but the Christians cannot comprehend him because their theological epistemology is based on sense-perception (7.36). And their Logos concept is wedded to the flesh (7.42).

Celsus here follows the Platonic doctrine which affirmed that things are either intelligible, originating in the realm of Being; or sensible-visible, deriving from the realm of Becoming. Truth comes from Being which is apprehended by pure thought. Error, which is based on opinion, derives from Becoming. Intelligible objects are known by the soul trained by philosophy. If the Christians believe that a divine spirit came to earth in order to reveal truths to men, it was the same spirit that announced these Platonic truths long ago. But in fact the Christians are really lamed in mind, follow errors newly created by the magician Jesus, and live a sensual-carnal life far removed from the True Doctrine passed down from antiquity.

CONCLUSIONS

Whether we speak about the True Doctrine of Celsus or the other ideas enunciated by the philosophers I have considered, it should be clear to the reader that the anti-Christian literature published by philosophers during the period 150–363 CE was characterized by an increasingly *hostile* attack upon Christianity by some of the best representatives of the cultured classes of the Roman empire. This description ('increasingly hostile attack') of the relationship between paganism and Christianity takes issue with current trends in modern scholarship which has often reinterpreted the *conflict* along the lines of *pluralism* and *syncretism*, rather than accepting the argument which we have presented in this chapter. There is no doubt that there were areas during our period where the pagans and Christians cooperated and collaborated with each other, and because of this more conciliatory ambience, relatively speaking, we may in a limited sense use words like pluralism and syncretism to attempt to define the pagan-Christian relationship. But on the whole, and especially as it relates to the continuing debate between educated Christians and pagan philosophers, 'increasingly hostile attack' would appear to be quite appropriate words to describe the pagan-Christian conflict during our period. We started with a rather dispassionate and concerned critic of Christianity (Celsus), and then moved to a magistrate in the Roman government who claimed to be benevolently correcting the errors of a man-made myth (Hierocles), and who at the same time 'behind closed doors' energetically persuaded Diocletian to launch the Great Persecution in February 303. The double threat posed by Porphyry to the Christians was his widely circulated anti-Christian works, one of which (the *Contra Christianos*) appears to have exclusively used the scriptures against his enemies; and his apparently close collaboration with Diocletianic officials to initiate the persecution. Neoplatonic philosophers like Porphyry particularly opposed the Christian doctrines of revelation, eschatology, creation, God, soteriology, and Christology. The latter's tenets of the incarnation, the passion, and the resurrection of the body grossly contradicted such cardinal Platonic teachings as divine immutability and impassibility, and simply seemed absurd to many philosophers who conceived reality as hierarchical and the cosmos as being divided into distinct ontological levels with the highly transcendent supreme principle at the top, and the material world at the bottom. As we will see in Chapter 50, with the advent of an apostate emperor (Julian), we witness an anti-Christian programme which began with a number of non-aggressive policies, predominantly in favour of the pagans, but which over a short period of time continued to develop into an increasingly hostile move against the Christians. One can only imagine what Julian would have done if his Persian campaign had been successful. What we do know is that during its most critical period when the pagan intelligentsia excoriated the doctrines of the church and caricatured the Christians as ignorant, gullible, and demonized, the church was consistently growing throughout the empire, and this may indeed be the principal reason why the pagan attack became increasingly hostile.

Of the three pagan philosophers whom we have discussed in this chapter, Porphyry represents the most formidable, and indeed we have identified him as the greatest opponent of Christianity in antiquity. His threat was in his subtle and

deceptive treatment of the founder of Christianity, acknowledging him as pious and dwelling with the gods in heaven, while at the same time totally rejecting his deity; and attempting to prove that his disciples misconstrued his teachings which were in conformity with traditional Graeco-Roman polytheism. Unlike other pagan polemicists, Porphyry apparently never described Jesus as a demonized magician whose primary objective was to deceive the masses, nor did he attribute his miracles to the operation of malignant spirits. This does not, however, mean that he was genuinely complimentary of Jesus, nor that he desired to incorporate him into the religions of the empire, at least from the perspective of the Christians who believed that he was God incarnate and the saviour of the world exclusive of all other gods.

The theme of this chapter is significant for a number of reasons. First, it reveals something of the truculent nature of the *intellectual conflict* between pagans and Christians in the Roman empire. Second, it demonstrates the struggle with the meaning of a truly universal religion, and whether this would be defined as a tolerant and inclusive polytheism supported by ancient religious customs, or as an intolerant and exclusive monotheism characterized by its particularity and a strong conviction that a recent and new divine revelation had been given to humanity. Third, the importance of the belief in *divine revelation*, espoused and defended by both pagan and Christian writers and focusing upon *prophetic revelation*, was one of the most important aspects of the pagan-Christian debate in antiquity, as has emerged in the discussion of the *True Discourse* of Celsus. This is a fact that has not been given the recognition that it deserves, and further research will undoubtedly produce admirable dividends. Fourth, we have shown that there was a continual debate between both groups concerning the true nature of the 'God-man' as he was perceived in the classical Mediterranean world. Finally, the close collaboration between pagan Neoplatonic philosophers and the Roman government, represented in the writings of Hierocles, Porphyry and Julian, but hinted at in the *True Discourse* of Celsus, accentuates the hostile nature of the opposition to Christianity during the period. Considering both the intensity of the criticism and the superb literary skills of the critics of Christianity that we have surveyed in this chapter, the most fascinating fact of all is not that the church eventually survived among so many cults in the Graeco-Roman world, but that it emerged triumphant.

NOTES

- 1 The thesis of Andressen (1955) is that Celsus develops a philosophy of history to oppose that of Justin. Some scholars concur: Chadwick (1966: 22), Hovland (1984), Wilken (1984: 101), Hauck (1985–6: 211–25, 220 and Amphoux (1992: 251). On the other hand, Burke (1985: 107–16) seeks to refute Andressen's thesis.
- 2 Although most scholars reject this idea: Chadwick (1953: xxiv–xxv; his translation is used here), Gallagher (1982: 115), Benko (1984: 108), Wilken (1984: 95), Hoffmann (1987: 31) and Lanata (1987: 12–13).
- 3 On allegory see Pelikan (1971: 31) and Chadwick (1947: 43). Chadwick (1953: x) points out that when Celsus uses Platonic arguments, Origen relies on Stoic refutations and vice versa. See also Hovland (1984: 210).
- 4 For the context, see Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 5.2; Eusebius, *Contra Hieroclem* 4, 19;

- On the Martyrs of Palestine* 5.3. Also Barnes (1976 and 1981: 21–3 and 165), Forrat and Des Places (1986: 1–14 and 17), Junod 1988, Speyer (1989) and Simmons (1995: 32–46). These secondary authors are also relied on extensively in my discussion.
- 5 For the Greek text and English translation, see Conybeare (1912).
 - 6 The structure is: Chapters 1–6 (introduction); 7–12 (*Philostratus* Book 1); 13–15 (Book 2); 16–22 (Book 3); 23–6 (Book 4); 27–9 (Book 5); 30–2 (Book 6); 33–40 (Books 7–8); 41–2 (on Fate and Necessity). See Campanini (1991: 20).
 - 7 Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 17: 'Basileus' in Greek. Cf. Rinaldi (1982) and *Vit. Plot.* 23.12–14.
 - 8 For his life and works see: Kroll (1894), Bidez (1913), Courcelle (1953), O'Meara (1959), Wolff (1962), Hagedorn and Merkelbach (1966), Hadot (1968), Demarolle (1972), Grant (1973), Smith (1974), Bouffartigue and Patillon (1977), Geffcken (1978), Meredith (1980), Des Places (1982), Croke (1983, 1984), Goulet (1984), Frend (1987), Evangeliou (1989), Edwards (1990, 1991), Simmons (1995: 1–46, 216–27), Beatrice (1996) and Simmons (1997).
 - 9 Eusebius, *HE* 6.19; Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 3, 14, 20; Hoffmann (1994: 16, 155); De Labriolle (1929); Hadot (1960); Pezella (1962).
 - 10 For analysis of his works, see Smith (1993). For the *Philosophia ex oraculis*, see Augustine, *Civ. Dei.* 10.32; also Bidez (1913: 20–36), Hadot (1960: 240), Dodds (1961), Pezella (1962: 303), Rist (1964), O'Meara (1969), Des Places (1971) and Majercik (1989).
 - 11 There is a huge literature on his scholarly achievements. (As a selection see Bidez 1913; O'Meara 1969; Hadot 1968; De Labriolle 1929: 386; Frassinetti 1953; Pezella 1962: 302–5; Dodds 1965: 126; Brown 1967: 316; Hadot 1960: 244; Demarolle 1972: 120; Meredith 1980: 1123–5; Beatrice 1989: 267; Simmons 1995: 18–32, and 218–22.)
 - 12 For some of the literature on the *Contra Christianos*, including its biblical criticism, see Harnack (1916), Hulen (1933), Frassinetti (1953), Schröder (1957), Anastos (1966), den Boer (1974), Casey (1976, 1990), Ferch (1982), Evangeliou (1989: 55), Sellew (1989) and Beatrice (1993).
 - 13 Also see Feldman (1990: 122), Benko (1984: 150), Borret 1984: 175–6), Mossetto (1986) and Puiggali (1987).
 - 14 For Celsus' criticism of the Jews see Chadwick (1953: xx), Frend (1984: 163), Wilken (1984: 112–17), Hoffmann (1987: 36) and Martinez (1990–1: 201–2).
 - 15 On illegal associations see Chadwick (1953: xvi) and Hoffmann (1987: 35).
 - 16 On the charge of sedition against Christians, see Chadwick (1953: xix), Dal Covolo (1979), Benko (1984: 46–7, 56), Frend (1984: 177–8) and Hovland (1984: 194–6, and 202), Wilken (1984: 117–25), Hoffmann (1987: 34), Feldman (1990: 124–5) and Markus (1990: 100).

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POPULAR GRAECO-ROMAN RESPONSES TO CHRISTIANITY



Craig de Vos

Modern historians have noted that there was no official persecution of Christians before the mid-third century. That is to say, there was no empire-wide ban on Christianity enforced from the top down. Rather, prior to that time, any actions that were taken against Christians were local and sporadic. As such, they would have been largely due to public opinion.¹

After all, the Roman legal system was accusatorial. It relied upon an accuser who laid the charge and presented the case, rather than on official investigation.² Consequently, for a Christian to be charged before a provincial governor meant that he or she would have been denounced and prosecuted by neighbours, family or friends (e.g. Pliny, *Epistulae* 10.96.2; 10.97.2; Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.9; Justin Martyr, *Apology* 2.2). That such a major step would be taken suggests that Christians would have been disliked, resented, and/or feared. Indeed, for neighbours, family or friends to bring them to trial suggests that animosity and resentment would have built up over a considerable period.

This is consistent with social-scientific analysis of conflict. 'Conflict' is understood as a process that involves 'an escalating sequence of responses between two disputants'. It begins with the recognition of differences in attitudes, norms, values and beliefs between those concerned, which may be accompanied by feelings of resentment. Conflict-proper only occurs when these differences become intolerable. For this second step to occur, some sort of 'trigger' (that is, some significant incident or event) is normally required (de Vos 1999a: 11–12). However, whether or not overt conflict occurs also depends on other social factors, especially the nature of social ties in that society. For example, if a Christian community was itself socially diverse and its members had significant ties to the different social strata of its local society (especially if there were strong and positive ties to the ruling elite) the incidence of conflict with non-Christians would have been much less than a Christian community that had a much more restricted pattern of social ties (de Vos 1999a).

Consequently, the incidence of recorded conflict does not necessarily have any bearing on the general perception of Christians. In other words, the fact that actual cases of harassment of Christians are recorded only infrequently does not weaken the assertion that the Christians were the subject of popular resentment. Such accusations are quite literally the 'tip of the iceberg'. Apart from feelings of resentment

that were not acted upon, there also would have been a spate of (unofficial) social and economic sanctions and verbal and physical abuse that simply would not have been recorded. Presumably this would have occurred before Christians were ever brought before magistrates.³ After all, history tends to preserve the unusual and the extreme, not the ordinary, average and everyday.

Therefore, the question we face is, what did the average person in the Graeco-Roman world dislike about Christians? Or, to put it another way, what did Christians do, or not do, that elicited such resentment and hostility? We will begin our exploration of this issue by looking for traces of popular opinion in the later New Testament, followed by Christian and non-Christian sources from the second and subsequent centuries. Following that we will seek to answer the question of why they perceived Christians in this light.

EVIDENCE FROM THE LATER NEW TESTAMENT

The author of 1 Peter suggests that his readers are experiencing conflict and oppression because of their severance of social ties and their generally separatist way of life (Elliott 1986: 67–8; Goppelt 1993: 39–40; Achtemeier 1996: 177; Kraybill 1996: 44). Indeed, he specifically asserts that ‘they are surprised that you do not now join them in the same wild profligacy, and they abuse you’ (1 Pet. 4:4; see also 1:14–19; 2:11–12; 4:2–4). Given John’s emphasis on a similar withdrawal and separatism in the Letters to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2–3), it is likely this also lay behind the sufferings his readers were experiencing (Kraybill 1996: 42). In other words, Christians were being harassed by their neighbours because they were seen as anti-social. They had stopped taking part in normal social activities (which were now considered immoral from the perspective of Christian morality) and they had thereby strained their relations with family, friends and neighbours.

Intimately linked to this separatism and social withdrawal was the Christians’ withdrawal from the traditional cults of their cities. After all, religion was completely integrated in Graeco-Roman society. Temples and shrines were ubiquitous, and they performed a range of religious, political, economic and social functions. For example, the major religious festivals (which included public feasts and often gladiatorial or athletic games) were the high-points of the city’s social calendar. It is quite clear that ‘everyone’ ordinarily participated in these festivals (see, for example, Pausanias, 10.32.8ff.; Xenophon, *Ephesiaca* 1.2.2–3; Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 2.26; Macmullen and Lane 1992: 45–9. Apart from joining the processions, it was customary for small altars to be set up outside houses and households would offer sacrifices as the processions passed by (Price 1984: 111–12; Kraybill 1996: 53, n.97). Although participation was not ‘compulsory’, as such, there generally was no good reason not to take part. Therefore, when Christians stopped doing so their changed behaviour must have been immediately noticeable to their family, friends and neighbours (Oakes 1995: 116; see also de Ste. Croix 1963: 25; Price 1984: 123).

In addition, travelling markets and fairs were often held in temple precincts and in conjunction with religious festivals. A Christian would not take part in these if she or he took seriously the requirement to avoid idolatry. Similarly, Christians

could no longer belong to a social club or a trade guild (*thiasos/collegium*) since this would mean participating in religious rites in honour of its patron deity. Consequently, withdrawal from these activities because of their cultic association would have meant an almost complete non-participation in society. In other words, not to take part in processions, sacrifices, feasts, fairs, clubs and guilds would have meant shunning their neighbours.⁴

This Christian attitude of separatism and socio-religious exclusivity is quite explicit in 1 Peter:

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct . . . You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.

(1:14–15, 18–19a)

Let the time that is past suffice for doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry. They are surprised that you do not now join them in the same wild profligacy, and they abuse you.

(4:13–14)

Indeed, the New Testament is full of exhortations to avoid 'idolatry' (for example, Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; 10:7–14; 2 Cor. 6:16; Gal. 5:20–1; Eph. 5:5; 1 Thess. 1:9–10; 1 John 5:21; Rev. 2:14–16, 20–5; 21:8; 22:15). If involvement in 'idolatrous' practices were avoided, this would have meant social withdrawal and offence to ordinary Greeks and Romans. Obviously some early Christians, such as the elite Christians at Corinth (1 Cor. 8:1–11:1) and some among the seven churches in Revelation (Rev. 3:1–4), did not. Where Christians did not withdraw from 'idolatrous practices', conflict with non-Christians does not appear to have been a significant issue (Kraybill 1996: 44; de Vos 1999a: 205–31, 271–5). This, in itself, attests to the connection between the early Christian tendency towards socio-religious exclusivity (as reflected in the majority of the New Testament authors), and the reprisals that were exacted against Christians.

Added to this, of course, would be the Christians' offence to Graeco-Roman religious sensibilities. Rejection of the gods and their cults was greatly resented by the common people (de Vos 1999a: 46–8; see also Stoops 1989: 83). It would have been a personal affront to their values and beliefs, indeed their whole world-view. The traditional gods and their cults were still held in high esteem, and were the subject of strong personal devotion among the common people (de Vos 1999a: 43–5, 48–50). Furthermore, the people's relationship with the gods was understood in a contractual sense. This relationship was described by the Romans as *pax deorum* – the belief that they had peace with the gods provided they kept up their end of the contract. In reality this meant that their personal safety and well-being, along with that of their town, depended upon them maintaining the good favour of the gods by correctly performing the appropriate rites (Garnsey and Saller 1987: 163, 175; de Vos 1999a: 43–56).

Consequently, since the gods were understood to protect the town and its inhabitants, the behaviour of the Christians was seen as a direct threat to their welfare and safety (Janssen 1979: 141; Sordi [1988] 1994: 203; de Vos 1999a: 51–3). This alone would have been sufficient to provoke considerable hostility against Christians.

Such resentment would have been even greater due to the increase in popularity and importance of the imperial cult. Although Thompson has rightly pointed out that the imperial cult predated Domitian (81–96 CE), and that Domitian may not have demanded the use of divine addresses (1990: 96–116, 159; see also Collins 1984: 71–2; Friesen 1993: 165–6; contra Cuss 1974: 57–8), there is no doubt that there was a change or growth in the cult during his reign (Friesen 1995: 249; Slater 1998: 233–8). Many remains exist of temples built for the cult (see Figure 33.2, for Pisidian Antioch). We also know that under Domitian a new provincial imperial cult was established at Ephesus and the Ephesian Olympics were instituted in his honour (Kraybill 1996: 27–8; see also Friesen 1993: 147–9, 160–4). Furthermore, imperial cult images were quite frequent on coins from the latter half of the first century (see Figures 33.1a, b and c).

As it happens, the seven churches of Revelation 2–3 were all located in major imperial cult centres. Revelation 13 strongly suggests that the imperial cult, described as the worship of a haughty and blasphemous beast (Rev. 13:1–10), was both prevalent and popular in the late first century.⁵ Therefore, when John attacked the cult (as he did, for example, in Rev. 14:9–12) he attacked something that was a major socio-religious institution, a significant vehicle for the expression of loyalty to Rome by provincials (Friesen 1995: 249), and the product of local, popular enthusiasm (Price 1984: 78–9; Garnsey and Saller 1987: 165). Furthermore, even as early as Tiberius' reign (14–37 CE), Tacitus claims that 'the town of Cyzicus was charged with neglecting the cult of the deified Augustus' (*Annals* 4.36). So criticism of and opposition to this institution would also have been perceived as a threat to the city's welfare. If John's attitude was at all common among Christians in this period an apparent increase in anti-Christian sentiment should not be surprising.⁶

At the same time, rejection of the traditional gods and cults, as well as the imperial cult, could have had a significant impact on the local economy. Cult festivals, with their processions, sacrifices, feasts, fairs and games, were a major source of revenue.⁷ Resentment of Christian practices due to loss of income is quite apparent in Acts 16:19–21 (see de Vos 1999b) and especially in Acts 19:23–41. In the latter, the Ephesian silversmiths feared the impact of the preaching of Paul and his companions on their livelihoods, which were intimately associated with the cult of Ephesian Artemis. Therefore, they incited the mob to gather in the theatre (see Figure 33.3), dragging two companions of Paul and Barnabas along with them. After much confusion, the town clerk managed to quiet them down and the crowd left the theatre (Acts 19:23–41; see also Stoops 1989: 73, 83–4; Sordi [1988] 1994: 203). It is likely that such a scenario would have been repeated in many other cities.

In summary, then, it would seem that the Christians were resented because they refused to take a full part in society, snubbed their neighbours, spurned the gods and thereby threatened their neighbours' livelihoods and the safety of their towns, and

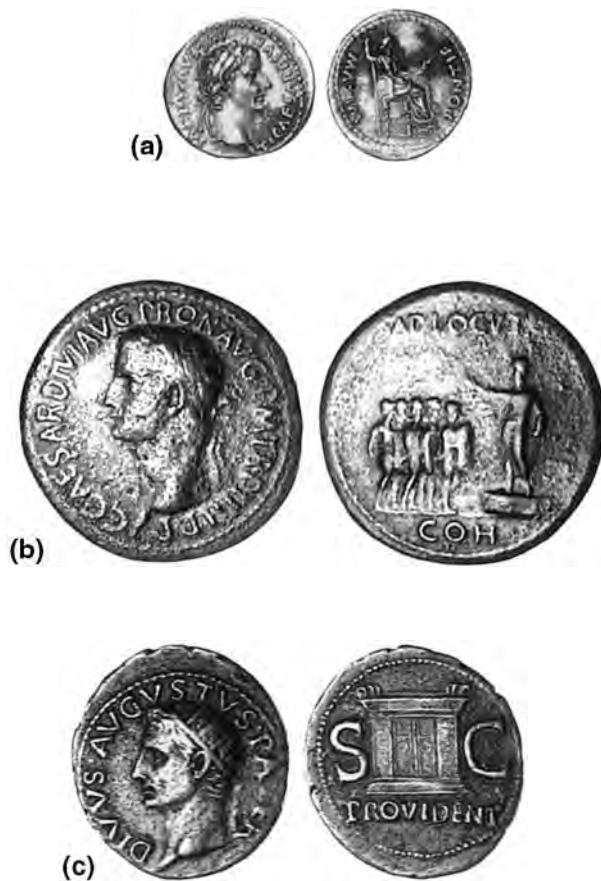


Figure 33.1a, b Coins of Tiberius and Gaius (Caligula) in which each is described as the son of the divine Augustus.

Figure 33.1c A coin issued by Tiberius commemorating Augustus after his death and describing him as 'Divine Father Augustus'.

offended their neighbours' social, political and religious values and beliefs. Consequently, it is not surprising that Christians were abused and harassed. Nor is it surprising that they were denounced to the authorities, even if this is recorded somewhat infrequently.

At the same time, it is clear that the Christians were denounced for what they thought to be trumped-up charges. For example, the author of 1 Peter suggests that his readers were the subject of abuse and slanderous accusations. Unfortunately, he does not explicitly indicate what these accusations might have been, except that he repeatedly uses the terms 'to do wrong' and 'wrongdoers' (2:12; 3:16–17; 4:14). The fact that both his readers and some among the readers of Revelation are denounced and suffer for the 'name' of 'Christ' or 'as a Christian' (1 Pet. 4:14–16; Rev. 2:17;



Figure 33.2 Remains of the Temple of Augustus and Roma at Pisidian Antioch. Photo J. C. N. Coulston.

3:5, 10, 12) would suggest that there was some overwhelming stigma or crime associated with belonging to the Christian community.⁸ But the nature of these charges is not explicit. Given the circumstances that Luke describes in Acts 16:19–21, the most likely accusation against the historical Paul and Silas at Philippi would have been one of practising magic or witchcraft (de Vos 1999b). However, due to Luke's apologetic agenda this charge is down-played. Instead, the charge that Luke records (or constructs), 'they advocate customs which it is not lawful for us Romans to accept or practice' (Acts 16:21), is quite ambiguous. Therefore, while it is clear that Christians were denounced simply for being Christians, and this was due to an association with some crime or stigma, the nature of this is nowhere explicit in the New Testament. It only becomes explicit when we turn to subsequent writers.

EVIDENCE FROM OTHER SOURCES

Tacitus claims that Nero blamed the Christians for the Great Fire of Rome in 64 CE because they were 'hated for their atrocities' by the mob (*Annals* 15.44).⁹ Suetonius also describes the Christians as a group 'given to a new and vile superstition', and records Nero's harassment of them. But he does not specifically link this to the fire (*Nero* 16.2; see also Cuss 1974: 150). Therefore, although a connection between actions against Christians and the fire may be somewhat tenuous, there is little



Figure 33.3 The theatre in Ephesus. Photo Philip F. Esler.

doubt that in the later half of the first century and the first half of the second century the Roman mob disliked Christians because they believed them to be guilty of a range of anti-social vices.

This is most apparent in the ‘lynching’ at Lyons in 177 CE (see Figure 33.4). On this occasion, Eusebius tells us:

the local Christians endured with dignity the assaults that the entire company of the people inflicted upon them: mockery and insults yelled at them, blows and beatings, dragging, lootings, stonings and imprisonments, and everything that an enraged mob is able to unleash against its foes and enemies. Then they were taken to the public square by the authorities and questioned before the entire populace before being imprisoned . . . After that they endured unimaginable tortures. . . Maturus, Sanctus, Blandina and Attalus were thrown into the amphitheatre to struggle with wild animals to be a public spectacle for pagan cruelty, . . . they ran the gauntlet of lashings, as is customarily done there; they were dragged by wild animals; they suffered everything that the frenzied mob demanded, first from one side of the arena, then from the other; finally, they were strapped to an iron chair above a fire, which burned their bodies and smothered them with smoke. Even then the pagans did not stop . . . Blandina, trussed to a stake, was exposed to the wild animals which



Figure 33.4 Amphitheatre at Lyons, scene of the martyrdom of Christians in 177 CE. Photo Everett Ferguson.

were released against her . . . And after the floggings, after the wild animals, after the iron-chair, she was finally thrown into a basket as a play-thing for a bull. For a while it tossed her about . . . Then she too was slaughtered.

(Eusebius, *HE* 5.1.7–8, 16, 38, 41, 56; my trans)

What is significant, however, is that Christians at Lyons who denied their faith were not spared. Eusebius notes that ‘those who had denied when the Christians were first arrested were also imprisoned with them and shared the same fate; for on this occasion their denial had profited them nothing’ (Eusebius, *HE* 5.1.33). This strongly suggests that they were specifically executed because they were thought to be guilty of various anti-social crimes. Indeed, Eusebius himself suggests the fury of the crowd was a result of rumours of ‘Thyestean feasts and Oedipean intercourse, and things which it is not possible to say aloud or to think’ (*HE* 5.1.14).

Similarly, when the magistrate reads out the charge of ‘being a Christian’ against Polycarp the crowd immediately demands his execution (*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 12.2). Even at the end of the second century, Tertullian still can exclaim that in trials of Christians ‘only one thing is looked for, and only one, what is needful for popular hatred is the confession of the name’ (*Apol.* 2.3).

From this it seems likely that to be a Christian in the second century meant that one was perceived to be some sort of criminal or engaged in illicit, antisocial, immoral activity. This is no different from what we saw in relation to the later New

Testament. However, in the second century the nature of such accusations do become explicit. Indeed, it is clear that, for the common people at least, Christianity was strongly associated with crimes such as ritual murder and the sacrifice of infants, cannibalism, incest and other illicit sexual activity, conspiracy to commit arson, 'hatred of humanity', and the practice of magic (Justin Martyr, *Apol.* 1.26; Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 8.4–5; 9.2–5; Tertullian, *Apol.* 7.1; Athenagoras, *Leg. pro Christ.* 3; *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 15, 20; Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96).¹⁰ For example, Tertullian sarcastically exclaims that Christians ought to be tortured to find out 'how many butchered babies each of us had eaten, how many acts of incest each had performed in the dark' (*Apol.* 2.5). Minucius Felix has an imaginary 'pagan' critic describe Christians as a 'band of questionable and illegal outlaws' who 'unite themselves against the gods'. Furthermore, he claims they are

people who assemble illiterates from the dregs of society . . . and so organise a rabble of impious conspirators, banded together by nocturnal meetings, ritual fasts and abnormal feasts, not for any religious devotion but for superstitious rites . . . everywhere they introduce a 'so-called' religion of lust, a promiscuous fraternity by which promiscuous behaviour becomes incest, under the guise of a sacred title.

(*Octavius* 8.4–9.3)

Apuleius says of one woman, whom most scholars consider a Christian, that:

She was like a filthy toilet into which virtually every vice had flowed. She was cruel and debauched, addicted to sex and wine, recalcitrant and stubborn, greedy in her petty thievery and extravagant in her loathsome excesses, an enemy of fidelity and a foe to chastity . . . She despised and mocked all of the gods, and, instead of following true piety, she hid behind a false and wicked god, whom she called 'the one and only god', to create hollow rites in order to deceive everyone, including her wretched husband. She gave herself over to liquor from day-break and to licentiousness until sunset.

(*Metamorphoses* 9.14)

In this regard, Christians were also thought to worship the head of an ass (Tertullian, *Apol.* 16; Damocritus, *Fr. Hist. Gr.* 4.377; see also McGowan 1994: 417). For example, the imaginary pagan critic of Christianity in Minucius Felix's *Octavius* claims that:

their empty and idiotic superstition actually boasts of criminal activity . . . unless there was some foundation to it, perceptive rumour would not associate it with blatant and shameful forms of depravity. I am led to believe that by some stupid impulse they consecrate and worship the head of an ass, the basest of all beasts, a religion worthy of the morals that sired it.

(*Octavius* 9.3)

This accusation, which is also reflected in a famous graffito from the Palatine area of Rome (see Figure 9.6 in this volume), would appear to be linked to a similar accusation made against the Jews by several Hellenistic writers. In particular, Apion specifically linked worship of an ass's head to ritual murder and cannibalism

(Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.79–80, 91–102), and this link may be implied in the passage just cited from Minucius Felix (McGowan 1994: 417). It is possible that this derogatory scrawling was also intended to convey this same accusation.

Not surprisingly, given the nature of these accusations, Christians were seen as a threat or danger to society. In particular, they were thought to be corrupt teachers who deceived women and young people. They were also accused of undermining family life; that is, of seeking to split households (*Acts of Paul and Thecla* 8–15, 20).¹¹ In this regard, it is possible that heads of households may have become suspicious of adulterous affairs if their wives were entertaining strange men in their homes during the day, or were getting up early to go to secretive pre-dawn rituals (MacDonald 1997: 71; see also Benko 1984: 126).

Although we cannot be certain how much the average Greek or Roman knew of Christian rituals, certain practices, such as exorcism, speaking in tongues, praying ‘in the name of Jesus’, and the sign of the cross, could have been seen as magical rites.¹² Accusations of practising magic would have been particularly important if, as Wypustek claims, there was a growing fear of harmful magic over the course of the second and third centuries (1997: 283, 287). Such a fear may indeed be implied by Suetonius’ reference to Christianity as a ‘wicked’ or ‘criminal’ superstition (*malefica superstitio*; Suetonius, *Nero* 16.2; see also Janssen 1979: 157).

In the second and subsequent centuries the refusal of Christians to worship the traditional gods is also very prominent. They are frequently accused of ‘atheism’ (Justin Martyr, *Apol.* 1.5–6; Tertullian, *Apol.* 10.1; *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 12.2; Lucian, *Alexander the False Prophet* 38; Apuleius, *Met.* 9.14).¹³ For example, Minucius Felix’s imaginary pagan critic claims that ‘they disdain shrines as if tombs; they mock the gods; they ridicule at our most sacred rituals; deserving sympathy themselves, they pity our priests (if you can believe it)’ (*Oct.* 8.4). Indeed, such a complaint was probably the primary problem, as everything else stemmed from it (Benko 1984: 4; Sordi [1988] 1994: 160; MacDonald 1997: 59). This would also explain why Pliny only dismissed charges against people who denied they were Christians ‘once they had recited after me a prayer of invocation to the gods and had made wine and incense offerings to your statue’ (*Ep.* 10.96). Correspondingly, they became the scapegoats for the natural disasters experienced by local communities.¹⁴ Although somewhat sarcastic, Tertullian’s famous jibe is not an outrageous exaggeration:

If the Tiber rises to the city walls, if the Nile does not cover the flood-plains, if the heavens don’t move or if the earth does, if there is a famine or a plague, the roar is at once: ‘The Christians to the lion!’ Really! All of them to one lion?

(*Apol.* 40.2)

Indeed, there was mob violence against Christians in Asia Minor during the reign of Antoninus Pius (138–61) as a result of natural disasters (Williams 1997: 897; see also Justin Martyr, *Apol.* 1.68; Eusebius, *HE* 4.26.10). For example, they were blamed for earthquakes in about 152, and plagues and a Parthian attack in about 165. Christians were also blamed for earthquakes in the 230s.¹⁵ Frend even suggests that the Decian persecutions (250–1) can largely be attributed to this popular reaction against Christians in the face of natural disasters (1987: 6).

Popular resentment of Christians in this period can also be linked to the increasing importance of the imperial cult (McGowan 1994: 440). Thompson, however, contends that the role of the cult should not be overemphasized, because the issue of adherence to traditional cults was the main issue (1990: 164).¹⁶ Yet, in a sense, the cult *was* traditional – at least in the Hellenistic East. As we have seen, even in the first century it was both widespread and popular. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that mob violence towards Christians was more pronounced during the major imperial festivals.¹⁷ This is not surprising if observance of the cult was seen as a direct expression of loyalty to Rome and the emperor, upon whose goodwill cities in the Hellenistic East relied for their stability and prosperity.

Finally, ordinary people may also have denounced Christians to the authorities for economic reasons. Some, conceivably, may have denounced relatives, friends or neighbours in the hope of gaining their goods. After all, Roman law rewarded in that way those who could successfully prosecute another (Lane Fox 1986: 425; see, for example, Suetonius, *Nero* 10.1). It is more likely, however, that economic motivation was linked to the impact of Christian attitudes and practices on people's livelihoods, as we saw earlier in the case at Ephesus (Acts 19:23–41). For example, Pliny notes that following his actions against Christians 'meat from sacrifices is again being sold everywhere, although until recently hardly anyone seemed to be buying it' (*Ep.* 10.96). In other words, there had been a decline in the sale of meat left over from sacrifices that he directly attributed to the Christians. In the context of the numerous denunciations he mentions, it would not be surprising if many of the informers had been those most affected by this (Thompson 1990: 131; Kraybill 1996: 52–3). Anyone whose occupation was associated with temple practice would have been disadvantaged by Christian withdrawal.

As we saw in relation to the New Testament writings, it seems quite clear from later Christian and non-Christian sources that Christians were disliked, or even feared, because of the threat they posed to society. They rejected the gods, which was believed to harm people's very livelihoods and welfare. Christians destroyed families and households, thus also weakening the very fabric of society. They were thought to engage in magic, and they were suspected and accused of engaging in a range of illicit, immoral and criminal acts. Indeed, by the end of the second century such anti-social attitudes and activities had become synonymous with the very name of 'Christian'.

WHY WERE THE CHRISTIANS RESENTED?

It seems quite clear that Christians were the objects of popular resentment. On the surface this appears to derive from their separatist and anti-social tendencies, and their failure to worship the traditional gods. However, scholars generally argue that the popular belief that Christians were involved in immoral or illicit activity arose from misunderstandings of the Christians' practices, liturgies and language. For example, it is suggested that the accusations of cannibalism arose from outsiders misinterpreting the words of the Eucharist. Expressions such as 'this is my body . . .

this is my blood' would have naturally lead to the assumption that Christians practised cannibalism. Similarly, the Christian ban on abortion and the exposure of infants was linked to this accusation of cannibalism; that is, the ban was introduced so that there would be excess infants for their cannibalistic practices.¹⁸

Accusations of incest are said to have arisen from a misunderstanding of the Christians' use of terms such as 'brother' and 'sister' or 'love' (Wagner 1994: 133; see also Sordi [1988] 1994: 32–3), and the practice of kissing one another.¹⁹ Similarly, accusations of adultery are attributed to women entertaining strange men in their homes during the day (MacDonald 1997: 71).

Accusations of magic are said to have arisen from the way that Christians sang hymns, spoke in tongues, prayed 'in the name of Jesus', made the sign of the cross and engaged in exorcism. All such activities would have been seen as 'magical' by outsiders. Indeed, the use of gesture, speaking in gibberish, and invoking the name of a powerful god were all common in magical incantations.²⁰ Furthermore, accusations of practising magic would have been linked to the Christian practice of holding secretive nocturnal rituals.²¹ Some have even suggested that these accusations arose because outsiders confused Christians with gnostics or Montanists, who probably did engage in such activities (Benko 1984: 67; Wypustek 1997: 277–9).

Nevertheless, can this popular perception of illicit and immoral activity be attributed simply to misunderstanding? In the first place, if accusations of immoral and illicit activity were simply based on misunderstanding how do we account for the fact that the same accusations were made repeatedly over a very long span of time? As we saw, such accusations may have been made in the time of the later New Testament. Even if they were not, they certainly were by the time of Pliny (early second century), and they continued until at least the early third century (de Ste. Croix 1963: 20–1; Krodell 1971: 261). Surely it is unreasonable to attribute a belief that is sustained over a period of more than a century (if not two centuries) to a misunderstanding.

Furthermore, the claim of misunderstanding assumes that ordinary outsiders had little substantial knowledge of Christian beliefs and practices. Given the nature of life in ancient cities, however, this is highly questionable. The common people in Graeco-Roman cities spent much of their time in communal spaces and in public activities, because their places of residence were very small. An average flat or apartment was really used only for sleeping and storing possessions – people relied upon baths, public latrines, temples, shops, cafés and inns for everything else. At the same time, streets were generally very narrow (seldom more than a few metres wide) and there was an extremely high population density. Consequently, Graeco-Roman cities were face-to-face communities; that is, they lived very public lives. Gossip was rampant. There was little privacy and few secrets, especially as town-planning, social structures and social institutions specifically sought to minimize them (de Vos 1999a: 28–37).

In light of this, it is hard to imagine that outsiders did not know a considerable amount about Christian practices and beliefs. Since early churches generally met in houses, workshops and apartments (de Vos 1999a: 147–50, 258–61), streets were very narrow (see Figures 33.5 and 33.6 as an indication of how narrow the streets



Figure 33.5 First-century street in Jerusalem. Photo Merrill Kitchen.

were and how closely people lived together), and housing was very dense, many outsiders would have heard quite a lot of Christian preaching and teaching.

For example, in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Thecla sat at her window across the street listening as Paul preached to the church that met in the house of Onesiphorus. She became a Christian as a direct result of what she heard. On the other hand, Thecla's mother (who no doubt also heard Paul's preaching) announced to Thecla's husband-to-be that 'she is obsessed with a foreigner teaching deceptive and crafty teachings . . . He claims we must fear only one God and live in abstinence' (*Acts of Paul and Thecla* 7–9). This is hardly a gross misunderstanding or misrepresentation of early Christian beliefs. Given the communal nature of city life, Christian beliefs and practices no doubt became a topic of conversation when people met at the local wells, the baths, the latrines, the shops, the cafés and so on.

Therefore, the argument that the popular accusations arose from misunderstanding due to ignorance or limited knowledge is hard to sustain, even if the Christians continually protested that their teachings and practices were being misunderstood (for example, Justin Martyr, *Apol.*; Minucius Felix *Oct.*; Tertullian, *Apol.*; Origen, *Contra Celsum*). After all, people could have made inquiries about the Christians, as Pliny did of those brought before him (*Ep.* 10.96), if they were concerned and wanted to get all of the facts. Consequently, if there was any 'misunderstanding' it must have been because outsiders were quite satisfied that they already knew the truth. They did not feel any need to investigate. Rather, as a number of scholars have suggested, because the Christians were seen as anti-social (both withdrawing from normal socio-religious activities and engaging in secret nocturnal gatherings) and they refused to worship the gods it was simply *assumed* that they must have been



Figure 33.6 Part of the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem. Photo Merrill Kitchen.

involved in immoral and illicit activity.²² People who did such things were surely capable of doing anything!

This popular assumption that the Christians must have been involved in a range of immoral and illicit activity is consistent with social-scientific analyses of Graeco-Roman society. As a number of scholars have noted (for example Malina and Neyrey 1996), the ancient Mediterranean world appears to have been a group-oriented or 'collectivist' society. In other words, Greeks and Romans gave priority to group rather than personal goals and their sense of identity was largely dependent upon the groups to which they belonged. Within such cultures people tended to think 'sociologically' rather than psychologically. As such, they were not really concerned with understanding each other in terms of the 'introspective, psychological ways' characteristic of modern western cultures (Malina and Neyrey 1996: xiii). Rather, they assessed themselves and others in terms of group-determined stereotypes. People were classified according to their family, race, place of origin and class. Indeed, if you knew these, you knew the person (Malina and Neyrey 1996: 7–17).

This 'stereotypic' approach is also very evident in the body of ancient work known

as the 'physiognomic' literature. Such literature assumed that one could tell another person's character from the way that he or she looked (Malina and Neyrey 1996: 100–8). In other words, it assumed that 'all internal qualities may be known rather easily from external traits and behaviors', which were held to be fixed and unchanging (Malina and Neyrey 1996: 149–50). Consequently, from their observation of Christian beliefs, values and practices it could be concluded that Christians *were* anti-social. And if they were anti-social then it was to be expected that they would be capable of any manner of anti-social activity. Furthermore, if one Christian was an anti-social atheist, then they all were.

This use of stereotypic accusations is also consistent with a sociological understanding of deviance: specifically, the labelling theory of deviance. According to this theory, 'deviance' is behaviour that is perceived to violate a group's norms and values. As such, deviance is not so much an inherent characteristic as a reaction. A person becomes a deviant via a 'labelling process' such that the person's behaviour is perceived to violate the group's norms and values, this perception is disseminated within the group, and the person is subjected to a status degradation ritual and receives the appropriate punishment.²³ Deviance labelling is particularly common in collectivist societies (de Vos 1999b), where it serves to establish and maintain social boundaries (Esler 1994: 141; with some modification also Barclay 1995: 117). This particular theory is helpful because it shows that people can be labelled as deviants, and treated as such, simply based on the way their actions are perceived. Provided their actions are seen to violate the norms and values of the dominant group, so that they constitute a threat to that group, it does not matter whether they have actually done what they are said to have done.

In light of this, it would appear that the popular perception of Christians as engaged in immoral and illicit activity involves stereotypic thinking. The specific accusations (such as cannibalism, incest and magic) should be seen as examples of deviance labels. As such, they do not require any basis in 'reality'. Rather, they simply function to label those so accused as anti-social, in order to strengthen the boundaries within society and exert social control. That these accusations against the Christians are deviance labels becomes quite apparent when we look at the similar accusations that were made against other individuals and groups. These same accusations were extremely common, and in many cases it is quite apparent that they were levelled in the absence of any teachings or practices that could have been misunderstood (see McGowan 1994: 413–14).

For example, Lucius Catilinus and his co-conspirators were accused of incest, human sacrifice and cannibalism. Sallust claims they drank blood to seal their conspiracy, whereas Dio Cassius accuses them of sacrificing a child and eating his intestines (Sallust, *Catiline* 22; Dio, 37.30; see also Benko 1984: 61; McGowan 1994: 431). Plutarch goes even further. He claims that Catilinus had 'once been accused of raping his own daughter and of murdering his own brother' and 'had corrupted a large number of the city's youth', but together with his co-conspirators had taken oaths among themselves, one of which involved sacrificing a man and eating his flesh (*Cic.* 865–6).

Such accusations were common against those suspected of conspiracy (Corbett 1997: 849; MacDonald 1997: 60). Cicero makes an accusation of cannibalism

against another political opponent (*In Vatinius interrogatio* 6.14; see McGowan 1994: 432). Such accusations were also levelled against Apollonius of Tyana who, with his associates, was said by Domitian to have 'sacrificed a boy in order to foresee the future' (Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 7.9; see also McGowan 1994: 432). Apuleius was brought to trial on charges of practising magic simply because he had married a wealthy widow in a town where he was an outsider (Apuleius, *Apologia* 25–8, 42–7; see also Kolenkow 1976: 108–9; Remus 1983: 70; de Vos 1999b). Agrippina was accused of adultery and using magic by someone who, Tacitus suggests, was simply trying to make a name for himself (Tacitus, *Annals* 4.52). It is doubtful that these accusations can be attributed to 'misunderstanding'.

Many foreign nations were also suspected of practices such as human sacrifice, cannibalism and incest, especially those on the fringes of the civilized (that is, the Graeco-Roman) world. For example, accusations of cannibalism and/or child sacrifice were levelled against most African tribes, some Egyptian tribes, some Gallic tribes (especially the Druids), Scythians, Carthaginians and the people of the Caucasus region.²⁴ Indeed, Aristotle claimed that 'there are many foreign races that tend toward murder and cannibalism' (*Politics* 8.3.4). Similarly, Pliny the Elder asserts that

some Scythian tribes, indeed most of them, feed on human flesh – a claim that may seem unbelievable if we do not consider that races of this ominous character have lived in the central part of the world, named Cyclopes and Laestrygones, and that until relatively recently the tribes just beyond the Alps routinely practised human sacrifice.

(NH 7.9–10.)

Accusations of incest were made against most devotees of Eastern religions (Benko 1984: 22, 62). Christians also made these same accusations against heterodox groups in the second century, particularly gnostics (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.25; 2.31; Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 7.32; Clement, *Stromateis* 3.2.10; see also de Ste. Croix 1963: 20–1; Frend 1967: 188; Benko 1984: 65–6, 71; MacDonald 1997: 59–64).

There are also numerous examples of individuals or groups who were accused of practising magic.²⁵ Furthermore, ritual murder was also commonly associated with the practice of magic (Benko 1984: 60–1). In fact, accusations of magic and conspiracy were traditionally linked in Graeco-Roman thought with secret nocturnal rituals. Since the Christians practised the latter it would simply have been assumed that they practised the former.²⁶

Rather than attributing many of the popular Graeco-Roman accusations against Christians (such as incest, illicit sexual behaviour, cannibalism, human sacrifice and the practice of magic) to misunderstanding, they should be seen as the stereotypic charges levelled against those who were perceived to threaten society. In other words, they were used to label those perceived to be deviants. Therefore, while those who claim that the accusations against the early Christians were based on misunderstanding assume that they were regarded as anti-social because they were thought to engage in such activity, it is more likely that because the Christians were regarded as anti-social it was assumed that they would engage in such activity.

The popular perception of and accusations against Christians simply reflect the stereotypic way that Graeco-Roman society described those who were perceived to be 'outsiders' and threats to their society.²⁷ Overall, it seems quite clear that Christians were resented by ordinary Greeks and Romans because they were dangerously deviant.

Therefore, on the whole, it would appear that ordinary Greeks and Romans disliked and resented Christians because of the threat they posed to society. Christians rejected the traditional gods and cults (including the imperial cult), an action that was believed to harm people's very livelihoods and welfare. They split families and households, thereby damaging the fundamental building-block of society. They were suspected (and accused) of engaging in magic and a range of illicit, immoral and criminal acts. Indeed, such anti-social attitudes and activities became synonymous with the very name of 'Christian'.

While scholars have attributed many of these accusations to misunderstanding, it is more likely that these were stereotypic accusations applied to those who were considered dangerous deviants. After all, these accusations were made over a long period of time – too long to be explained away as misunderstandings. Furthermore, similar accusations were also made against other individuals and groups who were perceived to be threats to Graeco-Roman society. When understood in terms of deviance labels, it is also clear that there need not have been any specific basis to these accusations, apart from the perception of the ordinary Greeks and Romans who made them.

NOTES

- 1 de Ste. Croix (1963: 6–7), Krodel (1971: 261), Lane Fox (1986: 423, 450), Garnsey and Saller (1987: 174), Barnes (1991: 236–7), Sordi (1988] 1994: 194–5), Williams (1997: 896) and Wypustek (1997: 276).
- 2 Benko (1984: 7–8), Lane Fox (1986: 425), Johnson (1988: 417), Phillips (1991: 263–4) and de Vos (1999b).
- 3 See Frend (1967: 156–7), Collins (1984: 98), Downing (1988: 115), Slater (1998: 245), see also Eusebius, *H. E.* 5.1.7; Athenagoras, *Legatio pro Christ.* 1.
- 4 See de Vos (1999a: 35–8), see also Wilken (1984: 63–5), Goppelt (1993: 39–40), Oakes (1995: 118–22), Achtemeier (1996: 282–5), Kraybill (1996: 52) and Slater (1998: 244, 250–1).
- 5 See Cuss (1974: 96–101), Price (1984: 252–65), Esler (1994: 132), Slater (1998: 253), even Thompson (1990: 160).
- 6 See Cuss (1974: 77, 84), Collins (1984: 101), Price (1984: 78–9), Achtemeier (1996: 285), Friesen (1995: 249–50), Kraybill (1996: 29–34) and Slater (1998: 238).
- 7 Thompson (1990: 161–2), Kraybill (1996: 29, 53) and de Vos (1999a: 35–6).
- 8 Downing (1988: 115), Goppelt (1993: 39–41, 327), Achtemeier (1996: 28–9;) and Slater (1998: 243).
- 9 See de Ste. Croix (1963: 8), MacMullen ([1966] 1992: 142), Frend (1967: 124, 155), Krodel (1971: 259) Cuss (1974: 149), Sordi ([1988] 1994: 31), Barnes (1991: 231), Goppelt (1993: 43) and Slater (1998: 247–8).
- 10 See also de Ste. Croix (1964: 31), Frend (1967: 195), Krodel (1971: 259), Janssen (1979: 151–4), Cunningham (1982: 8), Benko (1980: 1090–1 and 1984: 24, 60–70, 98), Lane

- Fox (1986: 427), Wagner (1994: 133), MacDonald (1997: 64–72), Reasoner (1997: 911) and Wypustek (1997: 277).
- 11 See also Frend (1979: 35), Benko (1984: 46) and MacDonald (1997: 64).
 - 12 See Aune (1980: 1545), Remus (1983: 60), Benko (1984: 113–19), Wypustek (1997: 282), de Vos (1999b), see also Tertullian, *Ad uxorem* 2.5.
 - 13 See also Frend (1967: 200), Janssen (1979: 151–4) Cunningham (1982: 8), Wagner (1994: 132) and Wypustek (1997: 277).
 - 14 See de Ste. Croix (1963: 24–6) Frend (1967: 177), Janssen (1979: 132–3), Wilken (1984: 63), Lane Fox (1986: 425–6), and Sordi ([1988] 1994: 56–7, 70, 160).
 - 15 So Frend (1967: 177, 198) Reasoner (1997: 912) and Williams (1997: 897).
 - 16 See also de Ste. Croix (1963: 10), Lane Fox (1986: 426), even Price (1984: 221).
 - 17 Cuss (1974: 158), Bowersock (1995: 48), Friesen (1993: 154, 166), see also Price (1984: 73–83, 111–12, 123–4).
 - 18 See Wagner (1994: 133), see also Benko (1984: 60), Sordi ([1988] 1994: 32–3, 197), and Goppelt (1993: 41).
 - 19 Benko (1984: 79, 98), see also Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14.
 - 20 Aune (1980: 1545), Remus (1983: 60), Benko (1984: 12, 24, 113–19) and Wypustek (1997: 282).
 - 21 Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 8.4–5; 9.4; see also Benko (1984: 10–12, 125–6) and Remus (1983: 60).
 - 22 See Krodel (1971: 261), Frend (1979: 35), Sordi ([1988] 1994: 31, 202), Phillips (1991: 262) and McGowan (1994: 437).
 - 23 See, for example, Malina and Neyrey (1991: 97–122) Barclay (1995: 114–27) Still (1996: 75–86), and de Vos (1999b).
 - 24 See Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 30.3–4; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 6.25; Herodotus, *Histories* 1.216; 3.38, 99; 4.26, 64, 106; Strabo, *Geog.* 15.1.56; and also Benko (1984: 17, 61–6), Collins (1984: 87) and McGowan (1994: 425–6, 431).
 - 25 For example, Tertullian, *De virginibus velandis* 15.1; *De spectaculis* 2.8; *De pudicitia* 5.11; Tacitus, *Annals* 2.69; Plutarch, *Conjug. praec.* 141B; *Dion.* 3.3; see also Aune (1980: 1523), Remus (1983: 52).
 - 26 Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 8.4–5; 9.4; Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96; Apuleius, *Met.* 9.14; see also Benko (1984: 10–12, 125–6), Remus (1983: 60).
 - 27 See Wilken (1984: 31–2), McGowan (1994: 433–4), MacDonald (1997: 60) and Slater (1998: 246).

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PART VIII

INTERNAL CHALLENGES



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INTERNAL RENEWAL AND DISSENT IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN WORLD



Sheila E. McGinn

Perhaps one of the most significant debates of this century among scholars of early Christianity is the extent to which it is appropriate to speak of 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy' before the Council of Nicaea (325 CE). The rise of historical criticism and its application to the development of doctrine shattered scholars' former straightforward assumption of the canon of Vincent of Lérins – that orthodoxy is what was believed by everyone, everywhere, at every time. Before many had come to terms with the evidence calling this assumption into question, a second and more significant challenge was raised by the German scholar Walter Bauer. In his *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* ('Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity'; 1934), Bauer called into question even the more modest assumption retained by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars – that orthodoxy was the common faith from which heretics then diverged. On the contrary, Bauer argued, heresy came first, and then orthodoxy.

The working assumption of the priority of orthodoxy, however, was not easily unseated. Its durability is illustrated by the fact that it took an entire generation before Bauer's challenge really gained much attention. Not until the mid-1960s did Bauer's work reach international recognition with its second German edition (1964), and then its English translation (1971). Prior to this, most scholars seem to have ignored it in the hope that its challenge would go away.

Such a substantial critique of the former scholarly approach could not be brushed aside forever. With the rise of 'engaged' scholarship in the 1970s (for example, in liberation theology and feminist hermeneutics) many began to press the question of what social, economic, and political factors may have influenced the doctrinal controversies of the first Christian centuries. Ecclesiastical decisions privileging certain doctrines over others were no longer viewed in a theological vacuum, but came to be seen in the context of wider social processes. All this transpired just as Bauer's work was finding a wider audience.

The title of this chapter illustrates how far the pendulum has swung. Even a few years ago, this section of a volume on the Early Christian World would have been entitled 'Heresy and Heresies'. Now the discussion is set in the framework of 'Internal Renewal and Dissent in the Early Christian World'. Individual movements still are given their traditional names – Gnosticism, Montanism, Donatism, and

Arianism – although without attempting to prejudge the question of their propriety, which currently itself is a matter of considerable debate, as the subsequent four chapters will show.

Some scholars of the early church period ('patristics') bemoan this interest in 'heresy' (see Henry 1982). The scholarly shift away from privileging conciliar decisions and statements of the 'Fathers of the church' is seen as bad enough, but at least it is understandable in light of the rise of historical critical methods. What has developed instead, they claim, is not an even-handed historical analysis, but rather the privileging of the heretics:

I believe we are the heirs of a third stage of development, one which goes beyond even-handedness. In much current writing about Christian origins, the Fathers are no longer put on a par with the heretics; they are put on the defensive, and it is assumed that the heretics are the true religious geniuses, and even more, the bearers of the authentically radical spiritual breakthrough inaugurated by Jesus.

(Henry 1982: 124)

Given the significance of the present debate and the breadth of evidence being adduced, attempting to summarize the sea of current thinking feels somewhat like walking on water. Nevertheless, a few broad strokes can be drawn, as long as one remembers that such generalizations will always have their exceptions in specific cases.

INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS

'Heretics' according to the traditional definition, are 'outsiders', those who have gone beyond the boundaries of the true faith. The Vincentian canon stipulated that 'orthodoxy' is what has been believed in the church by everyone, in every place, throughout time. Thus, if one adheres to some other kind of belief, by definition that places the person 'outside' the church. According to this view, there can be no such thing as 'internal dissent' in doctrinal matters, since a belief contrary to the established or majority view defines a person as 'outside' the church. Even after the rise of modern historical methods and the advent of a critical approach to doctrinal developments, this canon remained unchallenged for quite some time. Throughout the nineteenth century, and even into our own, church historians often simply repeated the sentence of their uncritical forebears when it came to determining 'orthodoxy' of insiders and the 'heterodoxy' or 'heresy' of 'outsiders'.

One of the first signs that this uncritical dike was beginning to leak came in 1881 with G. Nathanael Bonwetsch's *Die Geschichte des Montanismus* ('The History of Montanism'), where he noted a shifting view of whether or not Tertullian had been a heretic and, therefore, the beginnings of a question of whether the Montanist movement itself was or was not heretical. This attested to an increasing awareness of the fact that ancient authors gave the name 'heresy' indiscriminately both to movements which were doctrinally at variance with 'the great church' and ones which evidenced no such doctrinal variations but rather showed variations in ecclesiastical

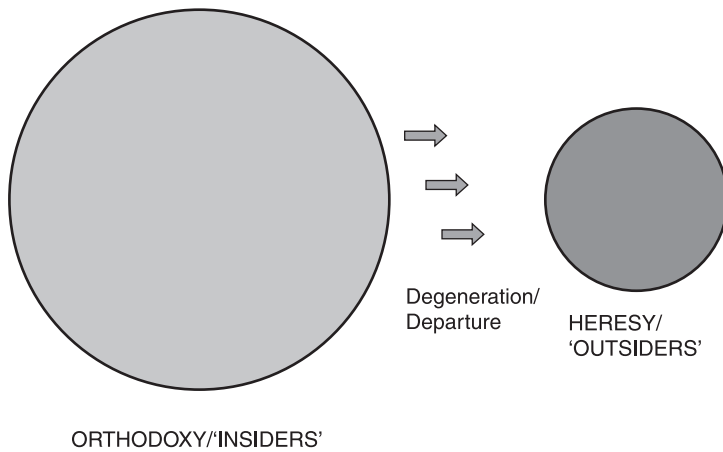


Figure 34.1 Orthodoxy and heresy in early Christianity as constituted by insiders and outsiders.

practice or discipline. Hence, scholars began to distinguish between ‘heresy’ as divergences from the belief system of ‘the great church’ and ‘schism’ as divergences in practice or discipline. Of course, at the same time, although they often were not cognizant of the significance of this language shift, they began to develop a new mapping of ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ in the history of early Christianity. And with this boundary shift began a new paradigm shift in the historical approach to opposing views in early Christianity.

The recognition of ‘schism’ as a distinct category from ‘heresy’ blurred the once clear boundary between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’. In the past, it was assumed that all those who were ‘insiders’ must have believed the same doctrines, worshipped the same ways, followed the same disciplinary practices and accepted the same leadership models. Any recognizable variation on these points was taken as a sign of being an ‘outsider’ to the great church – a heretic. Now it was argued that doctrine alone provided the dividing line between the ‘insiders’ versus the ‘outsiders’. One potentially could find a set of believers who engaged in different rituals, followed different disciplinary practices and also lived under a totally different ecclesiastical leadership structure than the great church, and yet evaluate them as ‘insiders’ – as long as there was no evidence of doctrinal disagreement. Thus was born the notion of internal ‘dissent’ or renewal as a historical reality for early Christianity.

It is perhaps not coincidental that this paradigm shift in evaluating early Christianity occurred towards the middle of this century, when there was a concomitant shift taking place in the relationships among major Christian denominations. The rise of the ‘ecumenical’ movement and of ‘interfaith’ dialogue among Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Lutherans, among others, shows the fruits of the *ressourcement* movement, where historians took a fresh look at Christian origins and what these sources might provide for the life of the contemporary church. The

pastoral effect of the historians' paradigm shift was the eventual recognition among different Christian groups that this is precisely what they were – different groups within Christianity, rather than one Christian church assailed by many heretical groups.

At the same time, one notices a growing awareness of the social and political uses (and abuses) of religion. The manipulation of the German ecclesiastical structure by the Nazi powers was lamented as one of the more serious causes of the Holocaust. The devastating, immoral, social and political affects of the branding of one group as 'heretics' and 'outsiders' could no longer be ignored. This gave church historians an added impetus to seek out the origins of such labels, as well as their social and political uses.

EARLY CHRISTIAN TRAJECTORIES

A watershed of this new discussion was the 1971 work of James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity*, where they laid out the evidence for early Christianity being a multiform reality, with differing characteristics dependent upon the geographical, social and cultural location in which it was found. At almost the same time, Robert Wilken directly confronted the Vincentian canon in *The Myth of Christian Beginnings* (1971). These studies were followed almost immediately by a wave of discussions of diversity in the early church, and even in the New Testament itself, as in James Dunn's 1977 work, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*. Koester furthered the argument for the diversity of the early Christian movement in his two-volume New Testament introduction (1982), breaking one further barrier by including apocryphal writings contemporaneous to the NT materials. Within two decades, what was taken for granted in discussions of the NT texts was no longer their consistency, but rather their variety; the unity of their thought was what required an argument (see Reumann 1991; Achtemeier 1987).

Perhaps the most significant feature thereby raised in the 'orthodoxy vs. heresy' discussions in the last quarter of this century has been the oft-repeated question of 'by whom are they considered heretics?' None of the extant literature of early Christianity claims the title heretic for its author; on the contrary, each author views her/himself as teaching true doctrine. If a 'false doctrine' is in view, it is that taught by others who are stigmatized as 'outsiders' to the teacher's group. The dynamic of 'insiders' (those who know the truth) versus 'outsiders' (those who teach and believe falsely) had been previously noted. Unquestioned before the late nineteenth century, even then, the 'insider' vs. 'outsider' distinction was taken by most scholars as descriptive of the historical situation, rather than being viewed as prescriptive for the ancient audience. But now the sociological and political dimensions of this language were noticed, and scholars began to undertake a serious analysis of its significance.

The new 'theologies of liberation' both arose out of and expanded upon this social and political analysis. Sociologist George Zito summarizes the common view of liberation theologians, as well as of many contemporary historians of early

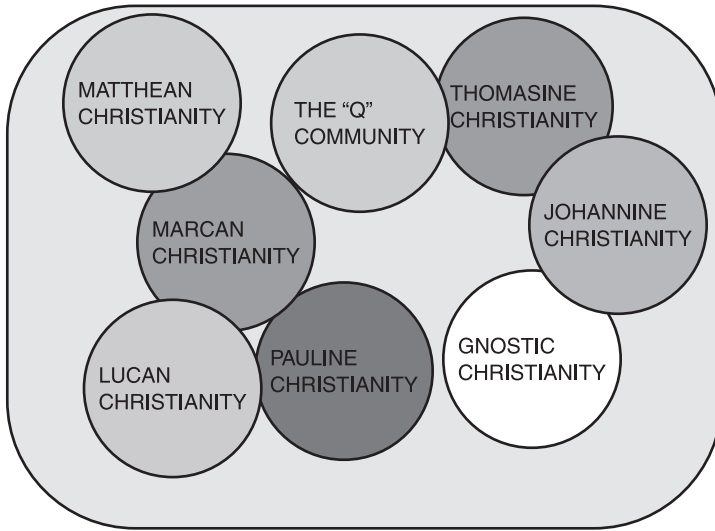


Figure 34.2 Christianities in the New Testament and related literature.

Christianity, when he explains that the heretical status of an articulated opinion is determined by the institutionalized legitimation of the discourse within which a heresy is voiced (1983). 'Heresy' is a thought-world which threatens established power relations, whether ecclesiastical or political. 'Heresy' is a semiotic phenomenon employing words that result in cognitive disorientation of those who accept the status quo, thereby categorizing themselves as true believers. In short, scholars must recognize that speech is contextual and perspectival; whether overtly or covertly, it both expresses and reinforces group boundaries. One can no longer speak simply of orthodoxy and heresy without defining *whose* orthodoxy or *whose* heresy. And the determination of which view will become orthodoxy is not only a theological process, but a social and political one as well.

Framing the discussion of theological trends or movements within early Christianity as a question of 'internal renewal and dissent' – rather than of 'orthodoxy versus heresy' – presumes this paradigm shift from the notion of a universal Christianity with uniformity of belief and practice to that of an ecumenical Christianity with some consistent patterns as well as distinctive features in every place where it was found. The boundaries between 'insider' and 'outsider' become very hazy indeed. If we suspect as prescriptive, rather than descriptive, the statements of ancient authors who charge another group with 'heresy', then the only boundary guidelines that remain are those which are self-selected by the groups themselves. This shift of the burden of proof is one of the developments that troubles scholars such as Henry, on p. 894. And unsettling it well may be, for it certainly has complicated the issues. It has broadened the scope of early Christianity so much that most scholars today would speak of 'early Christianities' rather than referring to a singular, univocal description of the movement.

In this context, the notion of 'internal renewal and dissent' comes to have two

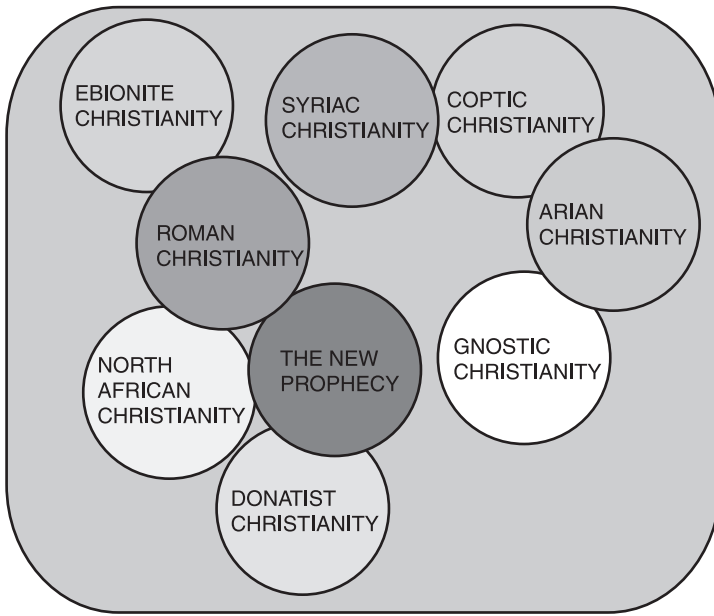


Figure 34.3 Christianities in the first four Christian centuries.

meanings. In the broadest sense, it simply refers to the pluralism which we find among these different trajectories of early Christianity due to their varied geographical, social and cultural contexts – whether or not there actually seems to have been any overt historical conflict over these different developments of the Christian movement. In the second place, it refers to the actual differences of opinion which did indeed arise among various sectors of Christianity in its formative period.

RE-VISIONING THE PAST

While the terms ‘renewal’ and ‘dissent’ may imply a prior standard to which one wants to return or from which one wishes to diverge, they need not be read that way. On the contrary, the scholarly consensus at this point seems to be that variety preceded the development of a universal standard among the early churches. Taking into account the gradual development of agreement on issues of doctrine and practice, what appears in retrospect as ‘dissent’ seems to have originated as one legitimate option among many. It is only after an alternative becomes the dominant view that we can see the former as dissenting. Similarly, what appears in retrospect to be an ‘internal renewal’ movement may well have begun as one viable option, maintained by one group within the churches, and then later spread to other sectors of the church. Each case must be decided on its own grounds.

The remainder of this chapter is devoted to three examples of how such alternative approaches might change the way we envision the earliest history of Christianity.

To attain a sense of how powerful this paradigm shift might be, I have taken examples from across the spectrum of the early Christian movement: a case of orthodoxy, a case of heresy, and a case of schism.

The first example is from an ‘orthodox’ movement and leader, to see how our picture of orthodoxy changes if we re-contextualize this particular trajectory within it. Paul of Tarsus and Pauline Christianity (considered in detail in Chapter 7 of this volume) are a perfect case study, because Paul’s teaching is often seen as the hallmark of orthodoxy; indeed, Paul sometimes has been considered ‘the founder of Christianity’ itself. If Paulinism is viewed as one of the many choices in first-century Christianity, how does this change our understanding of Paul’s teaching and practice? What if Paulinism is no longer the hallmark of the ‘insider’ but rather a version of Christianity which may have been ‘outside’ the mainstream?

The second example is Gnosticism (see Chapter 35 of this volume), a movement traditionally understood as a heresy. But what would we find if we tried to understand Gnosticism as simply one of the many alternatives available during the formative period of Christianity? What would the Christians labelled as gnostics tell us about Christian faith and life if we viewed them as Christians, rather than as ‘gnostics’?

Finally, we will turn to Montanism (see Chapter 36 of this volume), a late second-century prophetic movement which its earliest opponents labelled a heresy, but which since has been understood as a schism. What difference does it make if we construe Montanism as a renewal movement *within* early Christianity, rather than a movement *breaking away from* early Christianity? Renewal means a revival of some lost practice and/or belief from the past. If Montanism really was a renewal movement, what was it that the Montanists saw being lost to early Christianity that needed to be recovered?

Paul of Tarsus, the first dissident

Antique historians and heresiologists (e.g., Irenaeus of Lyons, Eusebius of Caesarea) viewed Simon Magus as ‘the first author of all heresy’ (Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.13.5; cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.23.1), but Gerd Lüdemann has recently challenged this view (1996). Following up on a comment of Walter Bauer (1971: 236, n. 83), Lüdemann names Paul of Tarsus as ‘The Only Heretic of the Earliest Period’ (1996: 61). What he means to emphasize, of course, is that the notion of ‘heresy’ is perspectival and contextual. However, the further point is that, given Paul’s context in the first decades of the Christian movement, his views were divergent from the ‘mainstream’ understanding of what it meant to be a follower of the Messiah Jesus – assuming that one defines the ‘mainstream’ from the viewpoint of the mother church of Christianity, the Jerusalem church.

Although we may demur from his label for Paul, Lüdemann’s basic point is well taken. If we take into account the New Testament materials that pertain to Paul and his teachings, including Paul’s own letters, it becomes clear that Paul is arguing for an alternative understanding of Christianity than that which is dominant in the Jerusalem church of the 40s–50s, and probably also in Rome as well. According to both Acts 15 and Galatians 2: 1–10, the ‘Council of Jerusalem’ was convened at least

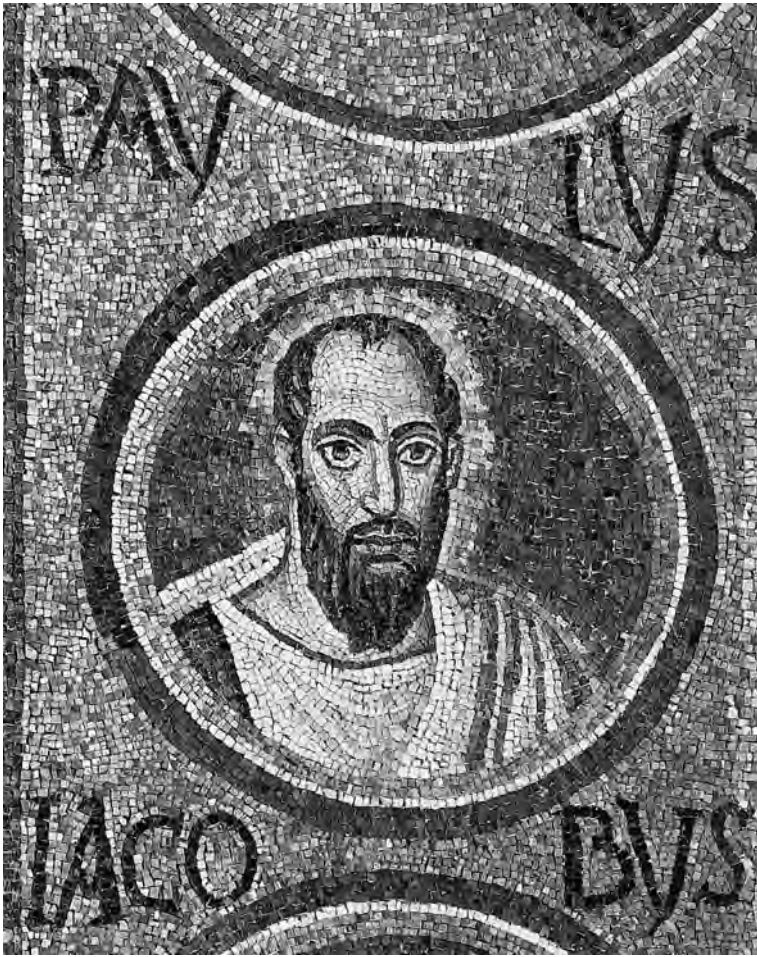


Figure 34.4 Mosaic of Saint Paul in the Museo Arcivescovile in Ravenna, Italy, dated 300–600 CE. Credit: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

in part to adjudicate between these two divergent presentations of the gospel. Acts 15:2 mentions that the reason for the meeting is ‘dissension’ between Paul and others. (Luke uses the term *stasis*, which can even mean ‘revolt’.) Clearly Paul believes that some Christians from Jerusalem are behind the ‘Judaizing’ troubles in Galatia, and he goes to great lengths to refute their position. In Gal. 2:11–14, Paul even mentions a later public confrontation with Peter in Antioch about the proper behaviour in fellowship meetings, possibly indicating deep division between Paul on the one hand and Peter and James on the other (Esler 1998: 126–40). Whether or not Paul was successful among the Galatians, we do not know; but he seems never to have returned to Antioch after this incident with Peter, which suggests that Paul’s view was not the winner in Syria. Nor does his apparent foreboding about his return to Jerusalem (in Rom. 15:30–2) bespeak a victory there.

We are left with a picture not of Paul as a spokesperson for the 'orthodox' or 'mainstream' view, but rather a marginalized Paul dissenting from the prevailing view, working from within – or perhaps along the fringes – for reform of an apparently well-established practice of having two ranks of converts, the first for men of Jewish origin, and the second for women and gentile men. This dissident Paul is castigated by many of his contemporaries for teaching an inadequate gospel, and is even rejected for engaging in practices which are called idolatrous (e.g., Rev. 2:14, 20; cf. 1 Cor. 8)!

One hundred years later, this picture is dramatically changed. No longer the minority voice, Paul's view on church practice has become the dominant one and the Jewish Christian view has become the one marginalized. To achieve membership in the Christian movement, one must accept the faith of Christ and receive baptism; circumcision is no longer an issue. The question of male–female relations in the church is not so easily resolved, but Paul's argument for equal treatment of Jews and gentile converts in the church has won the day. In fact, it is nearly a moot point given that the overwhelming majority of new Christians come from gentile origins. Eventually, the hard-liners who want to retain a more Jewish identity as Christians, rather than labelling Paul, are themselves the ones who are labelled, and these 'Ebionites' gradually fade out of our historical picture.

Which is it to be, Paul as 'apostle to the gentiles' or 'first among the heretics'? Was Paul of Tarsus an 'insider' or an 'outsider'? If we follow this new paradigm, then the answer must be 'both'. This is no mere equivocation, but rather a judgement imposed on us by the facts of the case. How we will use Paul's teachings in our time is a decision open to Christians of all stripes – laity, clerics and theologians – but how to evaluate Paul in his own time is a historical judgement which must be faithful to the historical data. And, as discomfiting as it may be to us, the data do not agree. To many of his contemporaries, Paul was a dissident and troublemaker. Later believers saw him rather as a great teacher and visionary. They can both be 'right'. John Barclay recently has argued for the need to take the perspective of the observer into account in assessing how Paul (and other ancient Jews of questionable status) were assessed by their contemporaries (1995).

For the most part, Paul's proponents were looking at the same features of Paul's theology as his detractors (e.g., the relationship between Torah and gospel; the circumcision question), but they evaluated these features differently because they came from different social and cultural contexts and, hence, were interested in fostering different social relations. Uncovering the context of their evaluations has provided greater depth and breadth to the historical understanding of early Christianity. This same kind of 'contextualizing' approach also is underway in the study of such movements as Gnosticism, Montanism, Donatism, and Arianism – movements that once were known as 'heresies'. If the first dissident, Paul, can become a valuable resource for later believers, perhaps we may yet glean at least some small insights from these other dissenting groups as well. And we certainly can discover why these groups, who viewed themselves as Christians, believed that their particular understanding of Christianity was preferable to the other options of the time.

What was it that the gnostics knew?

One of the earliest attempts to read dissenting voices from their own point of view was Elaine Pagels' study of the gnostics. Best known for her study of *The Gnostic Gospels* (1982), she already had published two earlier studies of gnostic exegesis of New Testament materials (1973, 1975). In *The Gnostic Gospels*, Pagels begins with the assertion that, in addition to its religious or theological content, 'the doctrine of bodily resurrection also serves an essential *political* function: it legitimizes the authority of certain men who claim to exercise exclusive leadership over the churches as the successors of the apostle Peter' (Pagels 1982: 38). The gnostic gospels, on the other hand, promote a spiritualized understanding of Christ's resurrection that involves a 'direct, personal contact with the "living One" . . . [which] offers the ultimate criterion of truth, taking precedence over all second-hand testimony and all tradition' (1982: 53). This notion of the resurrection, in giving pride of place to direct experience, thereby undercuts any possibility of developing an institutional structure of authority. The 'orthodox' view, on the other hand, centring as it does on the validity of a past historical experience granted to certain of Jesus' earliest disciples, necessarily makes those disciples and their experience an external criterion of truth, and thereby provides a solid ground on which to establish an institutional authority structure.

This notion that there are socio-political dynamics involved in 'heresy-making' has by now become a commonplace in early Christian studies. Pagels may have overstated the case in attributing primarily political motives to the proponents of the 'bodily resurrection' view versus the gnostics; for example, Mark's Gospel (16:1–8) reports the empty tomb, which presumably indicates a belief in the bodily resurrection of Christ, yet it does not privilege certain witnesses since there are no resurrection appearances reported. Hence, it is possible to hold to the 'orthodox' view of bodily resurrection without the political motives she outlines. Still, if somewhat reductionistic, her point is well taken that more than theology was at stake in these debates. Religions are human social organizations and, as such, they include human structures of power which are legitimated by the religious ideology. Scholars now recognize that early Christianity is not an exception, but rather a clear example of this rule.

So, what does it seem that the gnostics knew? First of all, they certainly recognized that repeating stories of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to certain individuals made those few individuals privileged witnesses to the event of the resurrection. Hence, telling such stories would be a way not only to proclaim the resurrection but also to proclaim the authority of those witnesses. Second, it seems reasonable to infer that the gnostics recognized that such a privileged status would generalize beyond authority concerning this one event to authority for interpreting the entire body of Jesus' teaching; no one else could experience the resurrected Lord the way these witnesses did, thus no one else could understand or teach the Lord's message as thoroughly as they did. Did they also envision that, third, this generalized authority would lead to a permanent, hierarchical rank for those witnesses – and, finally, for their 'successors' as well? This is less certain, although also possible – and they would have been right on all these points.

The gnostics provided the following alternative to this scenario. (1) Individuals become witnesses to the resurrection by means of a direct encounter with the Risen One, (2) thereby becoming reliable witnesses both to the resurrection and to the entire body of Jesus' teaching. (3) Although Pagels seems not to think so, it is possible that some individuals might even be granted a rank above others in the gnostic church, due to the depth of their spiritual experience, their teaching ability, or some other distinguishing feature (cf. the importance of demonstrating charismatic gifts in 1 Cor. 12–14). However, stage four in the preceding scenario could never take place; no one could 'succeed' someone in such an office, precisely because the office was based upon a direct experience of the foundational event of Christianity – the resurrection of the Lord. Each leader must begin with step one. And the leadership rank would not mean the same thing in the gnostic church, for any member could become a leader; they all could expect to experience the resurrection in a direct and immediate way, regardless of teacher or training.

As with Paul, there are lessons to be learned from the gnostics. The following are four which in fact have been taken up by different trajectories within Christianity, perhaps most noticeably since the Reformation period. First, the most powerful and compelling religious experience is 'unmediated'; it is an experience that believers have for themselves, rather than one that is reported to them. Second, for authenticity as a religious leader, it is necessary to have had this kind of compelling, first-hand experience. For example, to speak with authority as a leader of a Christian community, one must have had a personal experience of the Risen One. Third, hierarchical leadership is one model, but not the only model of leadership. Finally, leadership need not be limited on the basis of sex or other physical traits.

What did the New Prophecy reclaim?

The New Prophecy of Asia Minor (called 'Montanism' by its opponents – see Chapter 36 in this volume) was one example of a Christian movement which seems to have taken hold of these four lessons from Gnosticism, but without adopting the gnostic context for them. Montanism appears on the scene in Asia Minor during the third quarter of the second century. The movement originated in Phrygia, a region in the south-western portion of the Roman province of Asia. Three initial leaders are known by name: Maximilla, Montanus, and Priscilla. All three were prophets who seem to have had ecstatic experiences during worship, and who also gave prophetic speeches in discursive language. Several of their oracles survive, but none in their original context. A few are recorded by Tertullian of North Africa, but most appear only as fragments reported by anti-Montanist writers in order to refute them.

Montanism arose as a 'renewal movement' within the church to combat at least some of the teaching of Gnosticism. Over against a denial of the full humanity of Christ and of the historical reality of the resurrection, the surviving oracles proclaim the reality of Christ's incarnation and affirm a Trinitarian view of the Godhead (McGinn-Moorer 1989: 312–14). They insist on the salvation of 'the little ones' (not only the gnostic elect), the importance of moral discipline in the Christian life, and the value of martyrdom as a share in the power of Christ. Both of these latter

were viewed by libertarian gnostics as pointless acts, since they had to do with the flesh rather than the spirit.

The New Prophecy was often linked by its opponents with Gnosticism, however, because of the leadership patterns noted above. The leaders of the New Prophecy clearly had the kind of 'unmediated' religious experience noted above, for their leadership roles were based upon their prophetic gifts. Most scholars of Montanism view their leadership structure as more egalitarian than hierarchical, particularly given that leaders were selected based upon a charismatic gift. Their leadership consisted in the ability to share that gift of prophecy with the Montanist community, not on any kind of inherited rank. Two of the three prophets were women, which illustrates that sex was not a criterion for selection of Montanist leaders. Nor do other inherent physical traits appear to have been used as selection criteria. We do find that Maximilla and Priscilla separated from their husbands, presumably to lead a celibate lifestyle, but this is a status choice rather than an inherent physical characteristic.

The New Prophecy looks like a 'renewal movement' in its lively worship, and especially in its focus on the continuing revelation of God through prophetic speech and visions, precisely because this is not an innovation but a return to (or continuation of) an earlier tradition. Many first- and second-century Christian texts speak of prophets, prophecy, preachers speaking under the influence of the Spirit of God, worship in the Spirit, and similar themes (see 1 Cor. 11–14; Acts 2, 4, 9, etc.; *Didache* 10.7; 11.7). Clement of Rome (fl. 92–101) insists that his letter to Corinth is 'prompted by the Holy Spirit' (*First Epistle to the Corinthians* 63.2); in the opening greeting of each of his letters, Ignatius of Antioch (?–107) claims the title 'Theophorus' – God-bearer – because of his prophetic gifts (cf. his *Epistle to the Philadelphians* 7.2), and he encourages Polycarp of Smyrna (70?–156) to seek spiritual revelations (*Epistle to Polycarp* 2.2); the martyrs were known to have visions and revelations of Christ in their last hours (*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 2.2; 9.1), and even crowds of onlookers were said to see miraculous visions (*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 15.1–2). *The Shepherd of Hermas* is even a full-blown second-century apocalypse, including visions and revelations. In such a context, the prophetic activity found in Montanism can certainly be no novelty. However, it can be a revival of prophecy and other manifestations of the Spirit in the face of a rising emphasis on an authoritative teaching tradition that is 'handed down' by word of mouth.

The New Prophecy may have been a threat to the 'orthodox' church not because of its novelty but precisely because it maintained or revived an older, prophetic tradition rather than giving way to the new hierarchical tradition of authoritative teachers. Montanist insistence on prophecy posed a similar threat as did Gnosticism because of its understanding of leadership as arising out of a specific and immediate religious experience – in this case, the experience of prophetic revelation. The charismatic nature of this experience did not lend itself to the kind of control which was sought by those who claimed the name 'orthodox'. Direct and new revelation could threaten the existing beliefs of the church, and certainly could not be controlled by human agents in the same way that a teaching tradition could be. In addition, the Montanists permitted women to lead prayer and worship, whereas the orthodox increasingly wanted to restrict these roles to influential men.

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING BORROWED – WHICH IS TRUE?

As can be seen from the three preceding examples, the paradigm shift represented by this discussion of ‘internal renewal and dissent’ will have a profound impact on how we understand the development of ‘the early Christian world’. Particularly in regard to doctrinal and institutional developments, the most significant difference which results from this change in assumptions – i.e., that there were a variety of early Christian models from the very beginning, rather than one, static reality – is that early Christians become much less alien than we thought. The history of early Christianity is a history of choices amid pluralism, not of a *deus ex machina* and an unthinking mob response. Some of these choices were later evaluated as orthodoxy, some as heresy, and some as schism. But such evaluative hindsight does not mean that any Christian *chose* heresy or schism. As today, believers followed their best lights, disagreed on significant issues, argued about them, and sometimes castigated, stereotyped and marginalized those who disagreed with them. It remains important to learn what these early Christian groups borrowed from outsiders, revived from older traditions, or generated anew in light of their changing circumstances. Yet perhaps the most important thing we gain from this paradigm shift is that we now can learn how these diverse early Christian groups negotiated their differences, and what criteria they used to determine which of their old, new, and borrowed traditions would be retained for posterity. Whether we agree or disagree with their selections, whether we judge their decisions ultimately to be ‘heresy’ or ‘orthodoxy’, understanding the decision-making process is at least as important as recognizing its outcome.

Whether or not we know this history, contemporary Christians are not merely repeating but also continuing it. We can do so blindly, or we can do it intentionally, with openness to the lessons of these early Christian ‘dissenters’ and innovators. Perhaps we can arrive not at the divisive judgements of ‘heresy’ or ‘orthodoxy,’ but rather at a unity of purpose and understanding that might have been – and still might be.

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GNOSTICISM



Alastair H. B. Logan

INTRODUCTION

The early meanings of 'Gnosticism'

'Gnosticism' is the modern designation, probably coined in the eighteenth century, for a religious movement or group of movements of Late antiquity which claimed to possess a specific and superior type of knowledge, *gnosis*. That knowledge was of their origin in a heavenly world and fall into this lower world of evil, error and illusion, the handiwork of subordinate beings, and their awakening and return to that transcendent world through a saving call issued by a heavenly revealer. Knowledge is thus essentially saving knowledge, salvation is through self-acquaintance, and this knowledge tends to be reserved for an elite. Proponents of such a view seem first to have been identified and attacked by Christian writers of the middle to late second century, such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus of Lyons, as representing a form of Christian 'heresy' deriving from Simon Magus (Acts 8:9–24), although, as we shall see, there existed contemporary pagan forms of such *gnosis*, e.g. the *Poimandres* of the Corpus Hermeticum, and what has been argued to be evidence of pre-Christian, Jewish forms of it.

Justin Martyr seems to have been the first Christian author to write a treatise against all heresies (1 *Apology* 26.5), and the parallel he draws between heresies and the philosophical schools named after their founders, with their successions of teachers and pupils, developing novel lines of interpretation and thus increasingly disagreeing among themselves and departing further from the truth, seems to have profoundly influenced all later heresiology. Thus, echoing Justin, the major heresiologists, Irenaeus in his *Adversus haereses* of around 185, Pseudo-Hippolytus of Rome in his *Refutation of All Heresies* of the second decade of the third century, Hippolytus (d. 235), in his lost *Syntagma* against 32 heresies,¹ and Epiphanius of Salamis in his *Panarion* against 80 heresies of 375–7, reflect an increasingly stereotyped catalogue of Jewish and Christian heresies which includes groups called 'gnostics', seeing them as inspired by the Devil and Greek philosophy.

Now Justin himself does not mention a sect which called itself or was called 'gnostic', but simply refers to groups who claimed to be Christians but who were in

fact heretics, followers of and named after Simon Magus, his pupil Menander and Marcion, or who were called Marcionites, Valentinians, Basilidians and Saturnilians, etc., like the philosophical schools of Platonists, Stoics, Peripatetics and Pythagoreans (1 *Apol.* 26; *Dialogue with Trypho* 35, 80). It is Irenaeus writing his five books of detection and refutation (*Adversus haereses*) of 'the falsely so-called *gnosis*' (cf. 1 Tim. 6:20) in the 180s who seems to identify groups who called themselves 'gnostics/*gnostikoi*' in his additions to the heretical catalogue in Book 1 (chs 23–31), whose kernel ultimately derives from Justin. Thus he asserts of the libertine Carpocratian followers of a certain Marcellina who came to Rome in the time of Anicetus (154 CE on), 'they call themselves gnostics' (*Adv. haer.* 1.25.6). And at the end of Book 1, he deals at some length, apparently on the basis of written texts, with two mythological systems of a 'mass of gnostics' (*multitudo Gnosticorum*) whom he claims have arisen from the Simonians.

The first group are usually known as 'Barbelognostics', a secondary designation evidently derived from the name of the supreme female aeon of the myth, and the second as 'Ophites', again a later appellation derived from the prominence of the snake in their system; but Irenaeus plainly considers both to belong to the collective '*gnostikoi*', from whom he claims his chief targets, the Valentinians, derive (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.15; 2 Praef). Indeed his polemic against 'the falsely so-called *gnosis*' is directed against those who distinguish the supreme God and father of Christ from the Creator God of the Old Testament, the heavenly Christ from Jesus (or at least teach a docetic Christology), and claim only a part of us is saved (soul or spirit), denying the resurrection of the body, whom he repeatedly identifies as Valentinians, Basilidians, gnostics and Marcionites. His somewhat loose use of the term 'gnostic' has been the object of recent vigorous debate; does it apply to an actual group or is it just a general term for all the heretics of his catalogue as descendants of Simon Magus (Logan 1996: ch. 1)? I have argued that Irenaeus does have a particular group in mind, whose myth and initiation ritual profoundly influenced the Valentinians, and who are also represented by the Naassenes (from the Hebrew for snake) of Pseudo-Hippolytus, who called themselves '*gnostikoi*' (*Refutation of All Heresies* 5.6.4), and the Christian 'heretics' mentioned by Porphyry who attended Plotinus' philosophy classes in Rome in the 260s, and are the 'Gnostics' whom he attacks in *Ennead* 2.9.²

However, the problem is that such 'Gnostics' seem to disappear in later heresiologists such as Epiphanius, among whom the sects or groups who seem to correspond most closely to Irenaeus' 'Gnostics' are called by different names ('Sethians' and 'Archontics'), while the 'Gnostics' so-called represent a licentious branch of a predominantly ascetic movement (Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 16). Furthermore although Clement of Alexandria in the early third century can appeal to the ideal of the true Christian gnostic,³ and preserve valuable fragments of Basilides and his son Isidore, of Valentinus and of Carpocrates and his son Epiphanes, he makes only fleeting passing references to the false, heretical *gnosis*, which he attributes to a certain Prodicus.⁴ Conversely it is Clement who is responsible for preserving in a collection of excerpts attributed to Theodotus, a disciple of Valentinus, a famous formula which many take as the key to Gnosticism and which would confirm Irenaeus' portrayal of Valentinians as representatives of the falsely so-called *gnosis*:

Until baptism, they say, Fate is effective, but after it the astrologers no longer speak the truth. It is not the bath alone that makes us free, but also the knowledge (*gnosis*): who were we? what have we become? where were we? into what place have we been cast? whither are we hastening? from what are we delivered? what is birth? what is rebirth?

(*Excerpta ex Theodoto* 78.1–2)

It is this kind of knowledge, of our ultimate origin, our fall into this world and its hostile powers and rescue from it, which seems to underlie the mythological schemes of Irenaeus' gnostics and Valentinians (as well as Basilidians and even perhaps Simonians), which we might take as characteristic of the falsely so-called *gnosis* attacked by Irenaeus and his successors. It is the lack of such a scheme that tends to rule out Marcion as a proper representative of *gnosis*, despite Irenaeus' inclusion of him.

The problem of the definition of *gnosis*, gnostics and Gnosticism

Such then is the evidence about the gnostics and *gnosis* among the heresiologists, which in the end still seems ambiguous about the existence and variety of groups of Christians who can be classed as 'gnostics' – do they really hark back to Simon? Do they include Marcion or the Carpocratians, or the amazing variety of groups and systems in Pseudo-Hippolytus' *Refutation*?⁵ What happens to them after the third century? Until recently the patristic evidence tended to determine the way we saw such groups and defined Gnosticism, since the primary evidence to supplement that picture that emerged in the eighteenth century reflected an evidently late and degenerate form.⁶

But the discovery first of the Berlin Codex BG 8502 in 1896 (although not published till 1955), then of the Nag Hammadi library of Coptic texts in December 1945 (see Figure 35.1 showing the site), contained in 12 codices still in their original leather covers (see Figure 35.3) and leaves from a thirteenth, and including most sensationally the *Gospel of Thomas*, transformed the situation by its infusion of primary texts, the vast majority hitherto unknown, some possibly dating back in their original form to the second century or earlier. Here at last was a chance to put the patristic Fathers' claims and judgements to the test. The Nag Hammadi and Berlin texts are conveniently available in English translation (Robinson 1977).

For the striking thing about the Berlin Codex and the Nag Hammadi Library was the existence in them of no less than four versions of a post-resurrection revelation discourse of the Saviour to his disciples, the *Apocryphon of John* (see Figure 35.2, showing the end of this document, and the beginning of the *Gospel of Thomas*), whose first part bore a remarkable resemblance to Irenaeus' account of the 'Barbelognostics', while its second part was related, if more indirectly, to his account of the 'Ophites' in the following chapter. Further, the Nag Hammadi Library contained treatises of apparently Valentinian provenance which tended to confirm both the overall picture and certain divergent details of the Valentinian systems built up from study of Irenaeus, Pseudo-Hippolytus and Clement.⁷



Figure 35.1 The place of discovery of the Nag Hammadi library at the foot of the Djebel-el-Tarif. Photo by courtesy of The Institute for antiquity and Christianity, Claremont, California.

None of the texts, however, contained the self-designation ‘gnostic’, and both discoveries contained works which did not seem compatible either with the heretical classifications of the Fathers or with their categorization of *gnosis*. Thus we find in the collection some works which seem at first sight to bear no trace of Christian influence,⁸ some clearly pagan works, philosophical, ascetic and Hermetic,⁹ and the rest with varying degrees of Christian colouring, including one, the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, which was an unmistakable Christianization of the apparently non-Christian *Eugnostos*. The first western scholar to examine and publicize the texts, Jean Doresse, tried to identify them as the library of Epiphanius’ ‘Sethians’ (Doresse 1960), but his interpretation was not widely accepted.

Nevertheless, the publication of the most well-preserved and interesting texts

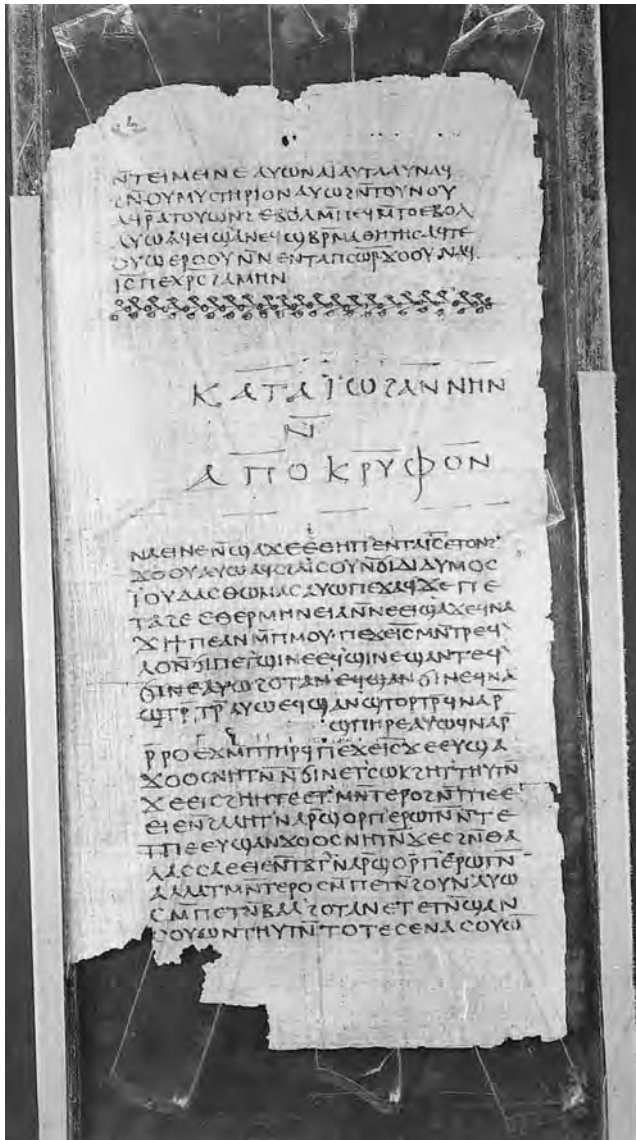


Figure 35.2 The end of the Apocryphon of John and the beginning of the Gospel of Thomas from the Nag Hammadi codices. Photo by courtesy of The Institute for antiquity and Christianity, Claremont, California.

such as the *Gospel of Truth*, evidently Valentinian and echoing Irenaeus' lapidary summary of that form of *gnosis*,¹⁰ the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, supplementing the information Doresse was able to provide from his cursory examination of the bulk of the Nag Hammadi texts (Figure 35.3), allowed a major colloquium on the origins of Gnosticism to take place in Messina in 1966. Building,

if critically, on the scholarship of the German History of Religions school, which had sought to see Gnosticism (or *Gnosis* in German) as a relatively independent Hellenistic religion of salvation emanating from the Orient, with a developed Redeemed Redeemer myth which had influenced Christianity (Bousset 1907; Reitzenstein 1904, 1921; Bultmann 1962), the Colloquium explored all kinds of possible contexts for the origins of Gnosticism/gnosis, Jewish, pagan, even Buddhist. However, it also attempted to produce, via a small international committee, a definition of the phenomenon, differentiating between the more general term '*gnosis*', defined as 'knowledge of divine mysteries reserved for an elite', and 'Gnosticism' as applied more specifically to an assortment of religious systems beginning in the second century CE as attested by the heresiologists.

The Colloquium suggested as a working definition of the latter the following:

a coherent series of characteristics that can be summarized in the idea of a divine spark in man, deriving from the divine realm, fallen into this world of fate, birth and death, and needing to be awakened by the divine counterpart of the self in order to be finally reintegrated. Compared with other conceptions of a 'devolution' of the divine, this idea is based ontologically on the conception of a downward movement of the divine whose periphery (often called Sophia [Wisdom] or Ennoia [Thought]) had to submit to the fate of entering into a crisis and producing – even if only indirectly – this world, upon which it cannot turn its back, since it is necessary for it to recover the *pneuma* – a



Figure 35.3 The Nag Hammadi codices, with their original leather covers, from a photo taken by Jean Doresse in Cairo in 1949. Photo by courtesy of The Institute for antiquity and Christianity, Claremont, California.

dualistic conception on a monistic background, expressed in a double movement of devolution and reintegration.

The type of *gnosis* involved in Gnosticism is conditioned by the ontological, theological and anthropological foundations indicated above. Not every *gnosis* is Gnosticism, but only that which involves in this perspective the idea of the divine consubstantiality of the spark that is in need of being awakened and reintegrated. This *gnosis* of Gnosticism involves the identity of the *knower* (the Gnostic), the *known* (the divine substance of one's transcendent self), and the *means by which one knows* (*gnosis* as an implicit divine faculty to be awakened and actualized. This *gnosis* is a revelation-tradition of a different type from the Biblical and Islamic revelation tradition.)

(Bianchi 1967: xxvi–xxvii)

The Colloquium also accepted the concepts of pre- and proto-gnosticism, to allow in the first case for elements which later became gnostic in the sense of the developed systems of the second century, and in the second for earlier, pre-Christian, embryonic forms of the latter.

Building on the evidence from the Nag Hammadi texts, coupled with Epiphanius' account of the Sethians, Hans-Martin Schenke claimed to detect the existence of a group of Sethian gnostics with their distinctive treatises, on the basis of shared characteristics (self-designation as 'seed of heavenly Seth', Seth as redeemer, the Mother Barbelo, the Autogenes and his four illuminator aeons, the Demiurge Ialdabaoth, the threefold advent of the redeemer, etc.), and certain shared features (including ritual practices and signs of later Christianization) (Schenke 1974, 1981). The category of 'Sethian' he expanded to include not only Christian groups (such as Irenaeus' Barbelognostics, Epiphanius' gnostics, Sethians and Archontics and the Christian 'heretics' of Plotinus), and Christian texts (such as the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the Untitled Text from the Bruce Codex), but apparently non-Christian texts (such as the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Zostrianos* and *Marsanes*), even when such texts did not feature heavenly Seth. He suggested that such a group of pre-Christian gnostics could well have arisen in a Samaritan milieu, and then in the encounter with Christianity have given their texts a superficial Christianization, while still retaining their distinct and alien essence and not ultimately synthesizing with Christianity (Schenke 1981: 607–13).

The severest critic of Schenke's 'Sethian Gnostic' hypothesis has been Frederik Wisse (1971, 1981), who has also been the most sceptical about the classifications of the heresiologists and has seen the Nag Hammadi texts not as evidence for the teaching of a sect or sects, but rather as the inspired creations of individuals who did not feel bound by the opinions of a religious community (1981: 575). However, Wisse's sceptical essay was published in a two-volume treatment (Layton 1980–1) of what had come to be accepted by many as the two main schools of Gnosticism, the (Christian) Valentinians and the (pre-Christian) Sethians. Indeed, what the editor of the volumes, Bentley Layton, has identified as classic gnostic scripture with its 'classic Gnostic myth', is virtually identical with Schenke's 'Sethian' texts (Layton 1987: xii–xiii).

Yet it is not only the attempted definitions of Messina and the suggested

classification of main gnostic schools that have recently been radically questioned, but the entire concept of Gnosticism (Williams 1996). Williams argues that since there is no true consensus even among experts on a definition of the category 'gnosticism', and since it evidently only succeeds in generating greater confusion, it should be abandoned for something better. Thus, although there is some agreement about certain features, such as that the material cosmos was created by one or more lower demiurges, other claimed defining features of 'gnosticism' are much more problematical. They have usually included the idea of a radically new attitude to the created order, one of 'protest' or 'revolt', an 'anti-cosmic attitude', as illustrated in the way gnostics treated Scripture (by reversing its sense in a kind of 'protest exegesis', particularly of Genesis), viewed the material cosmos (by allegedly rejecting it), looked at society (supposedly despising it) and felt about their own bodies (hating them). Apparently lacking any ethical concern, their view of themselves as 'saved by nature' by their inner spiritual character is supposed to have led to two characteristic responses, either of fanatical ascetic renunciation of the world, sex and the body, or of unrestrained licence and lawlessness (Williams 1996: 4f.).

Williams then proceeds to test each of these defining characteristics after setting out four case studies of what has been classed as 'gnosticism'; namely the *Apocryphon of John*, the Valentinianism of Ptolemy, the *Baruch* of Justin in Pseudo-Hippolytus and Marcion. He concludes that none of the characteristics (hermeneutical, anticosmic and antisomatic, parasitical, ascetic or libertine) adequately corresponds to the sheer diversity of the evidence, and that if we need a general category, 'gnosticism' or even 'gnosis' cannot provide it. He suggests as a better, more suitable and less restrictive category, 'biblical demiurgical', which does avoid the mistakes and misinterpretations bound up with 'gnosticism', and does more justice as a typology to what are for him a series of related religious innovations and new religious movements.

Is 'gnosticism' as a category therefore simply to be abandoned as too vague and misleading? Williams' case that too wide and vague a definition has been offered in the past is convincing, as is his description of the movements involved. Indeed one of the strengths of his approach is the utilization of insights from sociologists of religion such as Rodney Stark to cast light on the way new religious movements arise and grow or decline. Thus he would argue we should not think of a single phenomenon, Gnosticism or the gnostic religion, and try to define a single essence or seek a single origin for it; the chief error has been to confuse the issue of definition with the question of historical origins. However, he does allow the validity of exploring individual traditions, such as the 'Sethian', and the way they tend to resemble the schismatic 'church movements' or 'sect movements' identified by Stark and other sociologists of religion.

Williams here refers primarily to the distinction between church and sect in terms of 'ideal types' pioneered by Ernst Troeltsch, a pupil of Max Weber (Troeltsch 1931: 331–43). But Troeltsch's 'ideal types' with their half a dozen characteristics have proved impossible to use for theorizing. Thus Stark, building on the narrower definition that churches accept their social environment while sects reject it, suggested that churches are nearer the low tension pole and sects to the high, with the latter becoming more church-like and sparking off new sects desiring greater

tension with their social environment (Stark and Bainbridge 1985: 19–67). On this basis Williams would see the Valentinians and Basilidians as ‘church movements’ aiming to reduce tension, and the Marcionites as ‘sect movements’.

More promisingly, perhaps, he also draws attention to Stark and Bainbridge’s use of the term ‘cult’ as distinct from church and sect. They define cults as non-schismatic deviant groups which are innovatory, introducing an alien (external) religion or inventing a new indigenous one. They proceed to distinguish three types of contemporary cults: audience cults, client cults and cult movements. The first are literary, involving no formal organization or group commitment to a dogma (e.g. astrology); the second involve a therapist–client relationship (e.g. psychoanalysis), while only the third are genuinely religious, seeking to satisfy all the religious needs of believers (Stark and Bainbridge 1985: 24–30). Alan Scott has recently suggested that Schenke’s ‘Sethian’ gnostic sect is more like an audience cult, based on texts as objects of individual meditation, than a cult movement or sect (Scott 1995). While Williams admits the validity of Scott’s application to some of the relevant circles, he objects to Scott’s characterization of Sethian and other groups as highly deviant and in high tension with their environment, appealing to ‘church movements’ like the Valentinians (Williams 1996: 113).

However, neither Williams nor Scott have sufficiently taken in the full import of the Stark–Bainbridge definitions. Williams still treats his biblical–demiurgical movements as basically sects, of which some are more church-like than others, rather than as cults, while Scott has overlooked the communal, exclusive and sacramental character of groups like the Sethians, whom I prefer, with Layton, to call gnostics. Indeed, one only has to ask the question in terms of the Stark–Bainbridge definitions of sect and cult to see that ‘cult movement’ seems most appropriate. To supporters of the majority opinion that Gnosticism emerged from Judaism (e.g. Rudolph 1984: 276ff.) and of the minority view which sees it as an offshoot of Christianity (e.g. Pétrement 1991), one has to pose the question: is it then a schismatic, revival movement or series of movements harking back to the past (a sect), or rather a new religious movement or movements offering new answers to old problems (a cult)? Are such movements exclusivist, cutting themselves off from the Catholics, establishing a rival church organization (like the Marcionites), or do they not rather seek to mingle with the Catholics while claiming to be the true, perfect Christians? Is it not instructive in this regard that while Marcion was excommunicated and expelled from the Roman church, Valentinus was not, and even almost became a bishop.¹¹ And the consistent complaint from Justin to Eusebius about groups such as the Simonians is that they claim to be Christians and are so hard to spot precisely because they disguise themselves as Catholics!¹²

THE GNOSTICS, THEIR BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

So perhaps the most promising approach to the questions of defining Gnosticism, identifying its adherents and illuminating its origins, lies in seeing the phenomenon as involving a related series of cult rather than sect movements, which arose within the general religious milieu of Judaism and Christianity, and sought to answer

pressing questions within that milieu in new ways. Stark has recently suggested the key role played by religious geniuses, unusually creative individuals with deep religious concerns who perceive shortcomings in conventional faiths, something which increases during periods of social crisis. During such periods the numbers of people who receive novel revelations and the number willing to receive them is maximized. The more reinforcement the recipient receives, the more likely they are to have more revelations. And the interaction between successful founders and their followers tends to amplify heresy. The result of these interactions is more radical revelations (Stark 1992: 19–34).

Such a scenario of visionary geniuses founding cults to offer new solutions to pressing problems, arising out of social, political and cultural pressures but expressed in predominantly religious terms, may go a long way to account for the movements labelled ‘gnostic’, and help distinguish them from other, more sectarian movements such as Marcionitism. Such cult movements may have arisen in Judaism and may be reflected in such phenomena as the *minim* of the rabbis and belief in two powers in heaven, or in paganism as with the Jewish-influenced hermetic *gnosis* of the *Poimandres* (Pearson 1990: 139–47), but we have insufficient evidence to work with in such cases, and are soon led into uncontrolled speculation. We are on much firmer ground if, mindful of Williams’ strictures, we confine ourselves to those movements from the late first century which either call themselves ‘gnostic’ or appeal to a higher, saving knowledge, knowledge of the divine self, and which embrace a Platonic hierarchical world-view and myth and related ritual of fall and restoration of the divine, and seem to arise in a dialectic with a Judaism in crisis over its identity.

Thus it is surely no coincidence that the earliest movements which seem to meet our criteria of what is ‘gnostic’ seem to occur in areas where there is long-standing opposition to Judaism, such as Samaria in the first century (Simon and Menander), or in communities in which emergent Christianity is locked in conflict with a dominant Judaism, such as Antioch in the early second century (Ignatius, Saturninus, Irenaeus’ gnostics), or where Jews are facing the threat of extinction, such as Egypt, and Alexandria in particular, in the wake of the great Jewish revolt under Trajan (Basilides and Valentinus). Even the Jewish-hermetic *gnosis* of the *Poimandres* could fit into this scenario (Pearson 1990: 135–47). For Stark and Bainbridge have drawn attention to the fact that increasingly secularized Jews, of whatever era, are strikingly more liable to join cult movements (Stark and Bainbridge 1985: 400–3). The other feature Stark and Bainbridge isolate as significant for the rise of cults is also characteristic of these places and this period; namely, the lack of a dominant religion, which is also true of Rome (Simonians, gnostics, Valentinus).

When, where and why did such gnostic cult movements originate? The picture of the phenomenon I have presented so far suggests that, if we are to continue to speak of ‘gnosticism’, it can only accurately be applied to cult movements within a general Jewish and Christian milieu which called themselves ‘gnostic’ or understood salvation in terms of self-knowledge, awareness of the essential kinship between the inner self, soul or spirit and the divine. Such movements only make sense in the light of an overall myth or system which consciously reflects a Platonic world-view with its hierarchical levels of reality and myth of the soul and its fall and reascent. Further,

such cult movements, if we accept the Stark–Bainbridge thesis, tend to emerge as novel attempts to resolve pressing problems, social, political, religious, in a period of crisis.

This would seem to suggest that, although elements which later became ‘gnostic’ in the above sense were undoubtedly present in the first century when Christianity was emerging, they cannot be said to be ‘gnostic’ in the strict sense, and thus one is not really entitled to speak, for example, of a pre-Christian ‘gnosticism’ or of ‘gnosticism’ in Corinth. On the other hand, once we do enter the second century it may be possible to detect traces of what we have called ‘gnostic’ groups and ideas in Colossians and the Pastorals, as also in Ignatius of Antioch. R. M. Grant made a bold attempt to explain the rise of ‘gnosticism’ in terms of a reaction to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE (Grant 1966: 27–38), but that seems on the one hand too limited a factor to explain the entire varied phenomenon, and too early to take into account the general assimilation of Platonism into Judaism and Christianity that appears to be a specific characteristic of gnostic cults.

Further, although Simonianism as a cult movement seems well-attested from the second century on, and must have some relation to Simon, it is extremely difficult to determine what Simon taught and what part, if any, he himself had in the development of the myth involving Helen which the later sources attest, and which might justify classifying Simonianism as ‘gnostic’. Clearly Simon was a charismatic, prophetic figure, who from his portrayal emerges, not as a Samaritan heretic or schismatic founder of a Messianic sect, but, with his novel claim to be God himself, as an entrepreneurial cult founder. This role corresponds to the second of Stark and Bainbridge’s three models of cult formation, the first being the psychopathological and the third the subcultural-evolutionary (Stark and Bainbridge 1985: 171–88). The first, preferred by many social scientists, but rejected by Stark as inadequate to explain the data (Stark 1992: 19–34), implies that cult founders are ill or mad. The second is self-explanatory and the third suggests that cults can emerge without authoritative leaders, achieving radical developments by group interaction via many small steps. All three, which Stark and Bainbridge insist are compatible, supplemented by Stark’s concept of the creative religious genius operating in a period of crisis, can help illuminate the origins and development of the related cult movements which merit the classification ‘gnostic’.

If we exclude pre-Christian and first-century phenomena, including Simon’s original cult, as candidates for the title ‘gnostic’, we come to figures and movements at the beginning of the second century, such as Saturninus, Basilides and the shadowy opponents of Ignatius and also perhaps of the writers of Colossians and the Pastorals. Irenaeus’ summary of Saturninus’ views includes a single Father, unknown to all, seven angelic creators of the world and humanity, made after the image of the supreme power (cf. Gen. 1:26), but inferior until animated because of the likeness by that power with a divine spark which ascends to the supreme Father at death. To this hierarchical and dualistic picture are added a certain anti-Jewish animus and a docetic Christology: the unbegotten, incorporeal Saviour, Christ, appears like a human being to destroy the creator angels, including the God of the Jews, for their enmity to the Father, and to wipe out the evil class of humans and their assisting demons, while saving the other, good class, those with the divine spark. The final

element is an ascetic rejection of marriage, procreation and animal food. All this is based on a distinctive critical interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies: some were spoken by the world-creating angels, some by Satan, an apostate angel resisting the seven, and the Jewish God in particular (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.24.1–3).

In view of this, it is no wonder that Layton, who includes Saturninus in his section on classic gnostic scripture, has remarked that, despite its extreme compression and brevity, it refers to almost all parts of the gnostic myth and related topics, including anthropology, principles of biblical interpretation, Christology and ethics (Layton 1987: 159). Saturninus' system seems to reflect controversies between Jews and Christians in Antioch over vexed topics such as the proper interpretation of Scripture (in the Greek, or 'Septuagintal' version) on issues like the origin of evil and the goodness of the created order, the meaning of humanity being made in the image and likeness of God, the accuracy of Messianic prophecy, etc. And even if we cannot identify Saturninus and his followers as among the direct targets of Ignatius in his letters, the same range of issues seems to be involved, as he battles with Judaizers who reject his Christological interpretation of the Septuagint and docetists who deny the reality of Christ's humanity and suffering and reject the materiality of the Eucharist.

But Saturninus' system has inbuilt tensions and inconsistencies, especially between the idea of the spark in all and the idea of two races (Logan 1996: 168f.), no real explanation of how everything originated, no proper myth, or developed assimilation of Platonic philosophy, and he does not seem to have engendered a lasting movement. Basilides, associated with him by Irenaeus but based in Alexandria, goes some way to make up those deficiencies. Irenaeus' account, again based on Justin, begins with a cosmogonic myth: from the supreme unengendered Father is engendered Intellect (*nous*), from Intellect Word (*logos*), from Word Prudence, from Prudence Wisdom (*sophia*), and Power. Wisdom and Power produce powers, rulers and angels who create the first of 365 heavens by a series of emissions, corresponding to the number of days in the year. The last heaven, this visible one of ours, was created by the lowest group of angels, of whom the god of the Jews is the chief. Here Basilides' anti-Jewish animus becomes evident in what may be a veiled allusion to the Jewish revolt of 115–17 CE: because the Jews' god wished to subject all nations to them, the rest opposed him and the Jewish nation. This provoked the nameless Father to send his first-born, Intellect, called Christ, to save those who believed in him from the world-creating powers. Again the Christology is docetic: Christ appeared on earth as a man, but did not suffer; Simon of Cyrene was crucified in his stead, while Jesus, in his form, stood by laughing. As an incorporeal power he could transform himself as he liked. He ascended to his Father unimpeded and invisible. So those who have this knowledge(!) have been liberated from the world and its rulers (*archons*), and should not confess the man who was crucified, but the one who came in human form to destroy the works of the creator powers. Thus salvation involves only the soul; the body is by nature corruptible. Basilides too has a distinctive, anti-Jewish way of interpreting Scripture: the prophets were created by the world-creating powers while the Law was the special handiwork of the god of the Jews. Finally, his ethical stance was one of indifference both regarding meat offered to idols and other kinds of behaviour and pleasure (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.24.4–6).

Irenaeus' sketch is complemented by Clement of Alexandria, writing at the turn of the second century CE. He is quite sympathetic at times and offers perhaps the most accurate, if limited, information. He implies that Basilides taught an original ogdoad, and was an eclectic Christian philosopher blending Stoic ethical concerns with a Platonic and Pythagorean belief in reincarnation (Layton 1987: 415–44). But our knowledge of Basilides remains fragmentary and we cannot reconstruct his myth in any detail, although we do have evidence of a continuing movement, and Basilidians are one of the very few groups named in the Nag Hammadi texts, criticized along with Simonians and Valentinians for their liberal attitudes towards marriage.¹³ And Basilides is also clearly relevant for our definition of what constitutes 'gnostic' in that he seems among the first to have properly assimilated Platonic philosophy, its hierarchy and emanative system, its belief in the superiority of the soul and its reincarnation.

But it is with the gnostics of Irenaeus that we can confidently speak of a group that did call itself and fully deserves the title 'gnostic', that does represent a successful cult movement which developed a 'classic myth' and ritual of initiation which profoundly influenced the greatest and most Christian gnostic movement of all, that of the Valentinians. Indeed I would contend that it is this cult movement that embraces all the phenomena which Schenke classes as 'Sethian' and also takes in the Naassenes, the mysterious Aurelii with their hypogeum in Rome (Frend 1996: 209–11), the gnostics of Plotinus and Porphyry as well as the Borborites and other related licentious groups. Furthermore, it was this group I would claim which was responsible for collecting the Nag Hammadi texts as their library.

But can we determine where, when and why they began? As we have noted, Justin does not seem to be aware of them. But in attempting to reconstruct their beliefs and practices I have argued that behind the shadowy figures in Antioch whom Ignatius has in his sights, particularly in his letters to the Ephesians, Trallians and Smyrneans, may lie the pioneers of the gnostic cult. Ignatius implies that the breakaway group he is combating claims to be Christian, has shared with the community in the initiation rite of chrismation, but rejects the reality of the incarnation, cross and resurrection of Christ, as attested by law, prophets and gospel, and does not recognize or share in the Eucharist (*Ephesians* 7–9, 14, 17–20; *Trallians* 6–7, 9–11; *Smyrnaeans* 1–7). Now the key to understanding the identity of the gnostics and the factor which unites the varied phenomena which Schenke and Layton and others have identified, would seem to lie in the interaction of myth and initiation ritual which underlies such apparently disparate texts as the *Apocryphon of John*, the Naassene Preaching and the *Pistis Sophia*.

The creative genius behind the gnostic myth and ritual clearly shared the concerns of Saturninus and Basilides, the proper interpretation of Scripture as regards creation, humanity, the Messiah, law and ethics, etc., in opposition both to the Jews who had recently expelled Christians from their synagogues and to Judaizing Christians, but he/she seems to have started with the intoxicating experience of being born again as a Christian in the initiation rite of baptism and chrismation. What he or she adds to the systems of Saturninus and Basilides seems to have been developed out of that culminating saving experience in which the gnostic imitates the birth, naming and chrismation of the heavenly Son in the rite of baptism in the name of

the gnostic triad followed by the five seals rite of chrismation (Logan 1997: 188–93). This frees him/her from the consequences of a primal fall, that of heavenly Wisdom/Sophia. The new elements are thus the heavenly triad and related ritual of Father, Mother (heavenly Sophia but renamed Barbelo to distinguish her from the Sophia who falls), and Son, and the myth of Sophia, but they are evidently based on the same Old Testament evidence used by mainstream Christians to construct their theologies (i.e. Prov. 3:19; 8:22ff.; Wisd. 7:25f.; Pss. 2, 8, 45, 110) and on existing initiation rites. The other key element, alluded to in Saturninus but given a fundamental role reflecting the greater assimilation of Platonic ideas, is that of heavenly archetype and earthly copy.

The myth, whose first, cosmogonic, part is summarized in Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* 1.29, occurs in full in the *Apocryphon of John* supplemented by other Nag Hammadi treatises such as the *Gospel of the Egyptians* and *Trimorphic Protennoia* (Logan 1996). It first relates the origin of the heavenly triad of Father, Mother and Son, and traces the development of the heavenly world by male–female pairs of aeons, culminating in the appearance of heavenly Adamas, the archetype of humanity. It then recounts the genesis of this visible world through the error of the lowest aeon, Sophia. She tries to produce without her partner and without the consent of the supreme Father, and the result is the ignorant and arrogant Demiurge, Ialdabaoth, creator and ruler of this world and God of the Old Testament. His hubristic claim to be the only God results in the appearance of heavenly Adamas, whom he then gets his seven archons to copy (Gen. 1:26f.).

Genesis 1–4, suitably reinterpreted, thus becomes the second act of the cosmic drama, not the first. Earthly man is made after the heavenly image, but his/her essence is the divine power of Sophia inbreathed by the Demiurge (Gen. 2:7) to enable him to stand upright. Alarmed by such autonomy, Ialdabaoth plots to recover the divine power, and the events of Genesis and the rest of human history till the coming of the Saviour are represented as a series of moves by Sophia and counter-moves by Ialdabaoth and his seven archons, rulers of the planets. Thus, the human fleshly body, the division of the sexes, life in this world, law and ethics, sexual intercourse, fate itself, the efforts of the angels to mate with human women (Gen. 6:4) and in these last days the counterfeit spirit (i.e. the Antichrist), are all devices of Ialdabaoth to entrap the gnostics in this world and rob them of their divine power. The ‘Ophites’ of Irenaeus vividly illustrate the distinctive exegesis of the Old Testament of these gnostics: the prophets from Moses on are the mouth-pieces of Ialdabaoth, but unwittingly transmit some true prophecies through the activity of Sophia (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.30.11). Intriguingly, however, David and Solomon are omitted from the list of deluded prophets of Ialdabaoth, surely on the grounds that David’s Psalms and Solomon’s Proverbs and Wisdom, as primary source material for Christian (including gnostic) theology, had to be true, entirely inspired by Sophia!

Salvation, as with Basilides, only involves the soul, not the spiritual element as with the Valentinians, as we shall see. The present versions of the *Apocryphon*, particularly the long recension with its triple descent of a female Saviour figure, the last in the form of Christ, seem to have obscured the original pattern suggested by the ‘Ophite’ myth, of Sophia’s interim interventions to ensure the survival of the divine

power until the Saviour's final saving descent and revelation. The dialogue on the fates of different souls, however, better preserves the basic gnostic understanding of salvation in its intriguing and subtle solution to the classic dilemma faced by all Christians: how to balance divine initiative (the promise of universal salvation and the irresistibility of divine grace) and human response (the reality of human free will and human refusal). Thus they were able to avoid both the terrible predestinarian tangles of a salvation by nature approach (with which Valentinians were charged) or an appeal to the irresistibility of grace (to which Augustine was forced), on the one hand, and the unrealistic perfectionism of Pelagius, on the other.

The gnostic solution is to understand the light power of the Mother present in all humanity as the *capacity* for salvation, which yet needs the descent of the Father's Holy Spirit in the rite of sealing/chrisamation for completion. Salvation depends on which spirit dominates; the Holy Spirit or its demonic counterpart, the counterfeit spirit. Those souls on whom the Holy Spirit descends will be saved; all they need is ascetic freedom from the passions, using the flesh as a mere vehicle until on death they ascend to heaven. But those souls on whom the counterfeit spirit descends will be led astray, although there is always the possibility, via transmigration, of gaining the saving knowledge and ascending. Nevertheless, not all souls will be saved; those who had the saving knowledge but rejected it and repudiated the descent of the Spirit in the five seals rite of chrisamation (the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit) will suffer eternal punishment.¹⁴

Despite the awkward fact we noted at the outset that these gnostics tend to disappear as such in the later heresiological accounts, there is plenty of evidence of the spread and success of movements and groups inspired by them, their myth and their ritual, right on into the eighth century (Layton 1987: 6f.). It is in the very nature of such cult movements, after all, to change and transmute, a charge brought against them by Irenaeus himself. Indeed the very prominence of the figure of heavenly Seth in the Nag Hammadi documents, which contributed both to modern arguments for the pre-Christian Jewish character of 'gnosticism' and to Schenke's 'Sethian' sect hypothesis, I have argued, is in fact the result of a later Sethianizing reinterpretation at the end of the second and beginning of the third centuries, in response both to Catholic criticism of the novelty of the gnostic claims, and to the general rise of interest in the figure of Seth (Logan 1996: 47f.). But what is striking about the evidence from Nag Hammadi and elsewhere is the way that, despite such reinterpretation, basic features and figures of the myth recur, even in such distant and degenerate forms of the myth as the Untitled Text from the Bruce Codex and the gnostic (or Borborite), Sethian and Archontic systems described by Epiphanius.

What then of Valentinus and the Valentinians, whom I have described as the most Christian of the gnostic movements? Irenaeus, again probably echoing Justin, speaks of Valentinus as the first to adapt the fundamental principles of the so-called gnostic sect (*hairesis*) to his own brand of teaching (*Adv. haer.* 1.11.1), while at the end of his sections on the gnostics he remarks that from these teachings, like the Lernaean hydra, was born the many-headed wild beast of the school of Valentinus.¹⁵ This is not just another piece of heresiological rhetoric, for we do indeed find remarkable similarities between the two systems, particularly as regards the heavenly world of the aeons, the Sophia myth, and the ritual of initiation, but Valentinus

was a great poetic genius in his own right, a visionary who attracted creative pupils, more of whose names have been preserved than those of any other such cult founder. Thus the heresiologists tell of the Italian school of Ptolemy (whose system is summarized by Irenaeus at length) and Heracleon, the first to write a commentary (on John, first accepted by gnostics as authoritative), of Secundus, Marcus the magus (whose followers were active in the Rhône valley in Irenaeus' time), of Theotimus and Theodotus (from whom Clement collected valuable excerpts), and of the Eastern school of Axionicus of Antioch and Ardesianes, who saw the Saviour's body as spiritual (like Valentinus, but unlike the Italian school which considered it psychic).¹⁶

Valentinians crop up all over the ancient world, from Lyons to the valley of the Tigris, from the second to the eighth centuries (Layton 1987: 10f.; see Figure 35.4), and the Nag Hammadi Library has contributed several texts which appear to be Valentinian,¹⁷ adding priceless original material to the few fragments in the Fathers, and thereby helping us to assess with much greater confidence the accuracy and objectivity of their accounts. Unfortunately, besides the Justin/Irenaeus material, we only have fragments of Valentinus himself, largely preserved by Clement of Alexandria and more concerned with his ethics than his theology. Christoph Marksches, basing his thoughts on the fragments, has recently denied that Valentinus was responsible for the Valentinian myth; he was a Christian Platonist whose followers developed the characteristic myth Irenaeus describes (Marksches 1992).

But over against such a judgement based on such limited evidence we have to set, on the one hand, the picture we get from other sources of a visionary, founder of a cult with one of the most evocative myths of all time, and, on the other, the fact that even the fragments seem to hint at that myth (Logan 1994: 310–13). Thus Pseudo-Hippolytus records how Valentinus saw a small child, newly born, and asked him who he was, and he answered that he was the Logos. Then he added to this an imposing myth and on this, says Pseudo-Hippolytus, wants to base the sect (*hairesis*) founded by him (*Refutatio Haer.* 6.42.2). The 'imposing myth' is evidently that of the gnostics, particularly as it involves Sophia. The Valentinus of the fragments comes over as a very winning personality, author of letters, homilies and books, not so much the cult founder as dominating entrepreneur à la Simon Magus (Stark and Bainbridge model two), as the cult founder involved in creative interaction with his pupils (Stark and Bainbridge model three). For what is again striking about Valentinianism, which must be due in large part to the character and contribution of its founder, is the way that his pupils, despite all their variations and innovations gleefully charted by the heresiologists and present in original texts, retain certain key features and do not break away to form spin-off cults.

So what was Valentinus' contribution? What was the crisis to which he creatively responded? We have noted Basilides' likely response to the Jewish Revolt and his assimilation of contemporary philosophy, Stoic and Platonic. Valentinus, a younger fellow Alexandrian, seems to have followed a similar path. Colin Roberts has drawn attention to the vacuum in Egypt caused by the virtual extinction of Judaism and the Jewish Christianity associated with it (Roberts 1979). The failure of yet another Jewish Messianic uprising, and by implication of their understanding of God, may have represented that crisis. Valentinus seems to have sought to fill that vacuum by

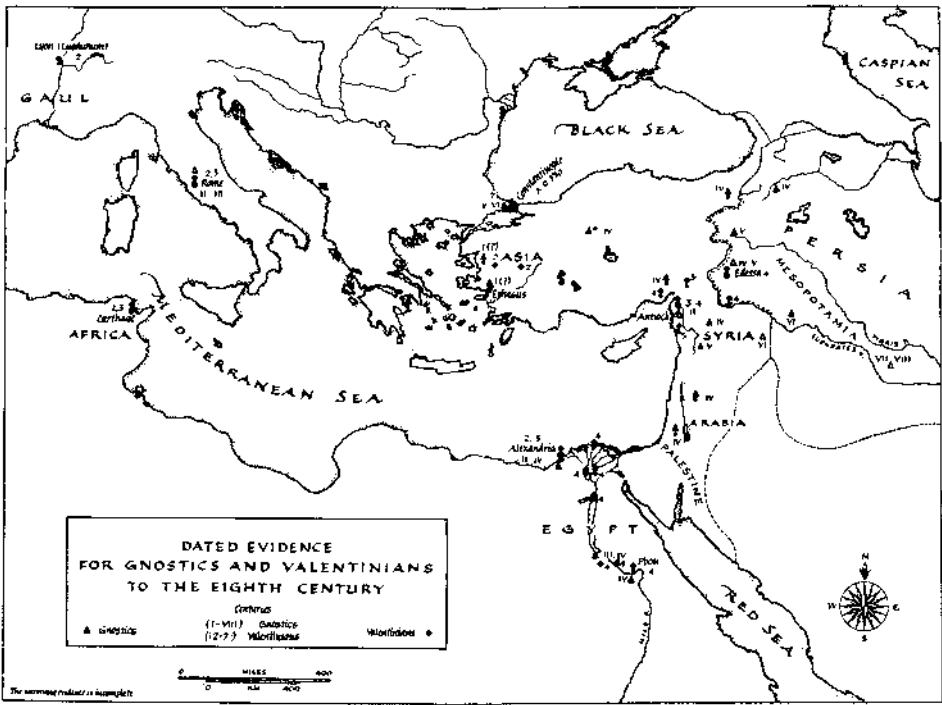


Figure 35.4 A map of dated evidence for the Gnostics and Valentinians to the eighth century; from *The Gnostic Scriptures*, by Bentley Layton. Copyright 1987 by Bentley Layton; used by permission of Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc.

the introduction, perhaps for the first time in Egypt, as an alternative to the discredited Jewish understanding, of a Pauline theology of divine grace and election, of spiritual versus psychic, and by further assimilation with pagan thought, particularly Platonism. His theogony and cosmogony involve a sophisticated reworking of the gnostic scheme, borrowing Pythagorean categories (dyad, tetrad, ogdoad) to produce a heavenly world or Pleroma of 30 aeons as mental aspects of God, and developing the gnostic pairing of male and female aeons into the fundamental ontological and soteriological principle of syzygy.

Irenaeus' account, again from the Justin material, has Valentinus start from an original dyad of Father and Silence who emanate the remaining 28 aeons, which Tertullian notes were entirely in the mind of God (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.11.1; Tertullian, *Adv. Val.* 4). One of the final 12 falls away (i.e. Sophia) and produces Christ outside the Pleroma. He immediately returns within, while she, bereft of spiritual substance, produces the Demiurge and a left-hand ruler (i.e. Satan), as with the gnostics, comments Irenaeus. He notes Valentinus' distinction between Christ and Jesus (as with the 'Ophites'), and the role of the Holy Spirit fructifying the aeons of the Pleroma. The rest of Valentinus' system has to be conjectured from the fragments and the systems of his pupils, but what does emerge seems to be a systematic expansion of the Platonic theme of archetype and image, a rather hostile

view of the Demiurge and his creator angels (like Saturninus, Basilides and the gnostics), a development of the idea of the divine as a spiritual seed rather than a power (as with the gnostics), an emphasis on the Pauline themes of the grace of God and the law written on the heart, and an understanding of Christ as entirely spiritual, body and all.¹⁸

The remaining accounts of Valentinian theology and original texts seem to represent variations on these themes, often in an attempt to soften the monstrous claim of a divine error or fall by positing two Sophias (Ptolemy), or in a very sophisticated exculpation of God for allowing the whole process (the *Tripartite Tractate*), or in a mystical meditation demythologizing the all-too-ugly details which has been attributed to Valentinus (the *Gospel of Truth*). Finally the Valentinian treatise from Codex XI, while presenting certain idiosyncratic features, does roughly correspond to the main lines of the picture presented by the heresiologists, being often close to what we have attributed to Valentinus himself.

What is new in all this is the sophisticated treatment of the themes of fullness and deficiency, of spirit and matter, of male angel and female elect, of the derivation of the cosmos from the emotions of fallen Sophia and the consequent division of reality into three categories and three types of humanity: the spiritual (the seed from Sophia sown in the world through the Demiurge, which is sometimes referred to as 'being saved by nature'¹⁹), the psychic, the handiwork of the Demiurge and consubstantial (*homoousios*) with him, and the hylic or material, the work of Satan. Thus the heart of the developed myth, as found for example in Ptolemy, is the repeated pattern of fall and restoration at successively lower levels, first of Sophia, then of her offspring Achamoth, then of the spiritual seed, the gnostic elect, sown in this world, and the salvation or rescue of what is fallen by a series of Christ figures, the last being Jesus, supplying form and knowledge to remove the deficiency. Salvation into the Pleroma is only for the spiritual seed who are depicted as female, united in marriage with their male angelic counterparts in the Valentinian sacrament of the bridal chamber, their equivalent of the Catholic Eucharist. A vivid allusion to this is found on the tombstone of the Roman Valentinian, Flavia Sophe (Quispel 1974). The psychics, to whom the ordinary Christians belong, are the creatures of the Demiurge and may attain a middle level of salvation by good works, while the hylics are doomed to destruction.

But despite the deterministic sounding language, grace seems to be the keynote and 'become what you are' the motto (on Valentinian theology, see especially Pagels 1972). And the Valentinians seem increasingly keen to be accepted both by Catholic Christians and by pagan society, to form a kind of bridge, modifying the fierce extremes of Christian asceticism and denial of the world, by seeing the world, fallen as it is, as nevertheless the theatre for the formation and salvation of the elect seed, with a Demiurge who is ignorant, not evil, and who attains a degree of salvation. Their cultic rather than sectarian character, and their ability to assimilate to Catholic Christianity, enabled them to survive for centuries as a kind of fifth column, and this perhaps helps to explain both the apparent lack of evidence for distinctive Valentinian hierarchies and forms of organization, on the one hand, but also the continuing obsession in church and state with trying to flush them out, on the other. The similarities with modern 'New Age' movements are evident here as elsewhere.

But what of the other texts found at Nag Hammadi, neither gnostic nor Valentinian? What of the most sensational find there which has generated more debate and literature than the rest put together, and which has barely been mentioned, the *Gospel of Thomas*? How does it fit in? The best solution seems to be to see the whole collection as the library – or better libraries – of a gnostic cult movement, with their classic myth and scripture, supplemented, as we see is attested for the Naassenes and Archontics,²⁰ with holy books and authoritative works and fragments of whatever provenance on the soul, its nature, vicissitudes and salvation, reflecting a basically ascetic standpoint. Hence the inclusion both of gnosticized Christian ascetic works of the Syrian Thomas tradition such as the *Gospel* and *Book of Thomas*, of pagan ascetic literature like the *Sentences of Sextus* and pagan *gnosis* such as the hermetic works, as well as appropriate Valentinian material. However, the absence both of any sign of sexual exclusiveness (e.g. in the salvation of souls) as of any scriptural commentaries, and the relative sophistication of the texts might suggest a mixed, well-educated community like Epiphanius' 'Gnostics' or 'Archontics' (or the Roman Aurelii) as the owners, weakening the popular hypothesis that the texts were preserved and copied by Pachomian monks in their monasteries in the areas of Achmim and Chenoboskia.

CONCLUSION

'Gnosticism' and 'gnostic' as designations of a clearly defined religious phenomenon of Late antiquity have rightly been criticized for being too vague and misleading, unable to contain the great variety of phenomena usually so described. But if understood of and restricted to a related family of cult movements springing up within the religious milieu of Judaism and Christianity of the late first century on, which either used the self-designation 'gnostic' or understood themselves within a Platonically influenced mythological scheme of 'fall' and restoration through a heavenly revealer-redeemer, then both can still be valid and useful. If such an understanding focuses primarily on the gnostic and Valentinian movements described above, it can also embrace, as the gnostics and their library did, the Jewish-influenced pagan *gnosis* of the Corpus Hermeticum. As cult movements seeking new answers to old problems and perhaps in the end alien to the spirit of Christianity, they yet were able to operate within it and exert a powerful influence on the emergence of what came to be 'orthodoxy'. They forced opponents like Irenaeus to develop an even better, more adequate, biblical and incarnational theology, and in turn, as so often in the history of Christian doctrine, were plundered by mainstream figures like Clement and Origen for good ideas.²¹

NOTES

- 1 Cf. Photius, *Bibliotheca* 121. The work is perhaps reconstructable from Ps. Tertullian, *Adversus omnes haereses* and Epiphanius, *Panarion*, etc. On the distinction between the two authors, see Brent (1995).

- 2 Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 16.
- 3 Cf. *Stromateis* 2.11; 4.4.8f., 21ff.; 6–7 *passim* on the true gnostic.
- 4 Cf. *Strom.* 2.11; 3.4.30, 1; 7.7.41, 1. On Prodicus see Tertullian, *Scorpiace*.
- 5 Cf. Foerster (1972), who includes alongside the Barbelognostics, Naassenes and Valentinians, Simon, Saturninus, Basilides, the Carpocratians and the systems of Pseudo-Hippolytus as well as the pagan hermetic *Poimandres* and the Christian encratite *Acts of Thomas*.
- 6 It consisted of three Coptic works of the fourth–fifth centuries CE: the treatise *Pistis Sophia* of the Codex Askewianus in the British Library, a third-century revelation discourse of Jesus to his disciples about the fate of Pistis Sophia (Faith–Wisdom), and the 2 *Books of Jeu* and Untitled Text of the Bruce Codex – the former another revelation discourse of Jesus about the heavenly world, the latter an account of the topography of the heavenly world involving aeons mentioned in Irenaeus’ account of the Barbelognostic system.
- 7 For the latter, see Sagnard (1947).
- 8 E.g. *The Apocalypse of Adam, The Paraphrase of Shem, Thunder: Perfect Mind, Eugnostos, The Three Steles of Seth, Marsanes*, etc.
- 9 E.g. Plato, *Republic* 588A–589B, *The Sentences of Sextus*, and the hermetic works *On the Eighth and Ninth, a Prayer of Thanksgiving* and part of the *Asclepius*.
- 10 Cf. *Gospel of Truth* (Nag Hammadi Codex I) 18.7–11; 24.28–25.19; *Adv. haer.* 1.21.4. See Jonas (1992: 309ff.).
- 11 Cf. Tertullian, *Adversus Valentinianos* 4. His lumping of Valentinus with Marcion as ‘*semel iterum ejecti*’ in *The Prescription of Heretics* 30 is never attested elsewhere, and seems typical exaggeration.
- 12 Cf. Justin, 1 *Apol.* 26; *Dial.* 35; 80; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiastica* 2.1.11f., 2.13.1.6f.
- 13 Cf. *Testament of Truth* [Nag Hammadi Codex IX] 56.1–58.6.
- 14 Nag Hammadi Codex II 25.16–27.31; Berlin Codex BG 64.14–71.2.
- 15 *Adv. haer.* 1.30.15. Pétrement (1991) tries to derive the gnostics from the Valentinians. See Logan (1996: Ch. 1).
- 16 Cf. Pseudo-Hippolytus, *Refutatio Haer.* 6.35.5–7; Tertullian, *Adv. Val.* 4.
- 17 E.g. *Gospel of Truth, On the Resurrection and Tripartite Tractate* from Codex I, the *Gospel of Philip* from Codex II and the Valentinian treatise and liturgical fragments from Codex XI.
- 18 On Valentinus, see Quispel (1947) and Stead (1969, 1980).
- 19 Cf. Irenaeus *Adv. haer.* 1.6.2; Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta ex Theod.* 56.3; Heracleon frag. 46; Tri Trac 1 19.16–18.
- 20 Cf. Pseudo-Hippolytus, *Refutatio Haer.* 5.7.8; 9.7; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 40.2.1–3.
- 21 For an intriguing linking of the gnostics, Valentinians and Origen see Quispel (1980).

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MONTANISM



Christine Trevett

ITS NAME AND ITS CHARACTER

‘Montanism’ appears first in Christian writings in Cyril of Jerusalem’s *Catechetical Lectures* (16.8) in the fourth century. Probably its earliest loyalists had called it ‘The New Prophecy’,¹ which is what Tertullian, its best-known convert, called it also.² The term ‘Montanism’ is anachronistic when used to describe its earliest phase, but it continues to be the designation most widely understood.

It derives from the name of Montanus, a prophet whose second-century activities in Phrygia, along with those of two female prophets Prisca/Priscilla and Maximilla, initiated a prophetic movement within Christianity which spread rapidly and came into conflict with the developing Catholic tradition. Leaders of the Catholic churches in the vicinity closed ranks and after some time New Prophecy believers were rejected from, and were probably also seceding from (the evidence is ambiguous), the mainstream churches.

In Carthage and Rome Montanism had a different history and it is important to distinguish carefully both between Montanism of different areas and between sources reflecting early and later dates of development.

Up to the decade of the 230s we know of New Prophets from the Asian and other sources preserved by Eusebius (an Anonymous source, Apollonius, and reports about Miltiades, Alcibiades, Serapion of Antioch and others), from Epiphanius of Salamis’ Anonymous early anti-Montanist source in *Panarion* 48.1–13, from Clement of Alexandria (*Stromateis* 4.13.93.1 and 7.17.108.1), Origen (*De principiis* 2.7.3 and in the *Catenae* on Paul’s Epistles to the Corinthians [Heine 1989a: 99]), from Hippolytus in Rome (*Commentary on Daniel* 4.20; *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 8.19; 10.25–6), from a number of writings of Tertullian in Carthage and from Firmilian of Caesarea’s letter to Cyprian in Carthage (Cyprian, *Epistula* 75 [74 in some editions]).

They tell of disputes between the New Prophets and the Catholic leadership in several parts of the empire. Catholics deplored the unbridled manner of prophesying and the prophets’ states of ecstasy. Such things, they claimed, did not match traditional Christian practice. Also the New Prophets had appropriated to their own age the Johannine promise of the Paraclete.³ Accusations that Montanus had identified himself as the Paraclete were later ones, however, reflected in spurious ‘oracles’ more

to do with contemporary debate about Trinitarian doctrine than the original teaching of the New Prophecy (Trevett 1996: 80).

Catholic writers were scathing about the New Prophets' so-called 'Jerusalem' communities (*H. E.* 5.18.2 [Apollonius and cf. Cyprian *Ep.* 75.10 from Firmilian]; Epiphanius *Pan.* 49.1), which were to be found in unprepossessing rural settings, and they challenged some Montanists' claims to probity along the following lines: in the second generation of leadership Themiso, a confessor, had allegedly bribed his way from prison and then had dared to pen a 'catholic' epistle. Some scholars see Montanism as a catalyst for the creation of a Christian canon (Walls 1964; Paulsen 1978; Trevett 1996; Robeck 1987), but its importance in that respect has probably been overemphasized. Next Alexander and an unnamed female prophet (*H. E.* 5.18.5–11 [Apollonius]) were castigated, and an opponent recounted the fate of Theodotus who experienced heavenly ascents but had died (so rumour had it) as the result of such hubris and an unspecified accident (*H. E.* 5.16.14 [Anonymous]). Tabbernee (1993: 267–8; 1997a: 21) surmises that Theodotus and Themiso held the distinctive Montanist office of *koinōnos*.

No epigraphy exists from this earliest stage but at some point Montanus, Maximilla and Priscilla were commemorated as 'Montanus and the Women' on an inscription destroyed in the sixth century with part of the great marble reliquary at Pepouza. Michael the Syrian recorded this in Book 11 of the *Chronicle*, describing John of Ephesus' response to an edict of Justinian I (527–65 CE). Pepouza had been central to Montanism from its beginnings. Events in the sixth century must have hastened its long and inexorable decline.

The 'newness' of the Prophecy probably related to its understanding of the New Covenant era, distinguishing it from prophetic revelation of the previous dispensation (Klawiter 1975: 64–6). The prophesyings were evidently out of the ordinary – unbridled, noisy and accompanied by unintelligible speech, which may imply glossolalia which would have been rare and misunderstood.⁴

New Prophets were criticized for the rigour of their discipline. In particular there was the teaching about marriage. Montanus' alleged teaching of 'annulment' may have amounted to no more than defending Priscilla's and Maximilla's decisions to leave their husbands on experiencing a call to prophesy (Eusebius, *H. E.* 5.18.2). Remarriage was discouraged and on penance and absolution the New Prophecy took a harder line than its opponents. As for fasting, there was to be more of it.

In Carthage Tertullian, a rigorist by instinct, denied that in essentials there was any novelty. In some respects the New Prophets merely made obligatory what the Catholics left to choice. The discipline of the New Prophecy was a *via media*, he suggested, between the Catholics' tendency to self-gratification and a gnostic or encratite hostility to the gifts of God.⁵ The Catholic side saw matters differently.

Another innovation was that perhaps for the first time in Christian history there were *salaried* officials (*H. E.* 5.18.2 [Apollonius]). This would have undercut the pre-eminence of men of good social standing and education (Stewart-Sykes 1999) and it would have diverted money, and gifts in kind, away from the mainstream churches. People of the lower orders, including perhaps even women, would have been empowered through such a change. In addition, collections of the New Prophets' teachings were in circulation and were being treated as authoritative by their

followers. They included the utterances of 'these weak females' (in Rome, Hippolytus, *Refut. omn. haer.* 8.19; *Comm. Dan.* 4.20). Consequently Eusebius' Anonymous hesitated to write any treatise against the New Prophecy lest he too be thought to be adding something to the New Covenant writings (*H. E.* 5.16.3). They held the same views about Christ and the creator as did the Catholics, Hippolytus observed, but they also had 'countless books' of their own (*Refut. omn. haer.* 8.19).

Its claims about 'prophetic succession', citing proto-Montanist prophets of the apostolic age and beyond, soon left the New Prophecy vulnerable. Some predictions were unfulfilled and no successor of note followed immediately after the death of Maximilla (Trevett 1997). Nevertheless, prophecy and receipt of visions did not die with the Three (as I call them for brevity's sake), as the witness of Tertullian, Firmilian, Origen and others indicates. Some epigraphy, too, suggests continuity in this respect. Notably there was Quintilla. She was probably a third-century Montanist who left the legacy of the Prophecy's most famous vision, received in Pepouza (Epiphanius was uncertain if she or Priscilla had seen it [*Pan.* 49.1]). It was that of Christ in female form who endowed her with wisdom and spoke of the descent of Jerusalem. The Quintillian branch of the Montanists (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 48.14; 49.1–2; cf. 51.33; Augustine, *De haeresibus* 27) was named after her. They seem to have been somewhat literalistic in their interpretation of eschatological sources (Trevett 1995, and 1996: 167–70; Elm 1996).

The New Prophets' eschatological fervour and zeal for martyrdom has often been overestimated and described as fanatical. The tendency is not dead (Sordi 1983: 72–3, 176–7, 195). In fact we know less about its eschatology than many have assumed. Expectation of the End certainly had figured in its earliest teachings and it owed much to the kinds of millenarian ideas preserved in the book of Revelation, 4 Ezra and other sources (Trevett 1996: 95–105; Stewart-Sykes 1997b, but note Hill 1992). Such expectations, however, were not uncommon.

Tertullian's encouragement to martyrdom (*De fuga in persecutione; Ad Martyras*) has tended to be treated as indicative of the wider New Prophet view, but it is hazardous to assume that Tertullian was typical of the group. Klawiter did regard persecution and the Montanist teaching on martyrdom as key factors in its rise and condemnation and he linked a reverence for confessors and their 'power of the keys' with Montanist women's rise to clerical office (Klawiter 1975, 1980; contrast McGinn-Moorer 1989: 9–11, and Trevett 1996: 190–5). But willingness, indeed eagerness, to embrace death was known amongst Catholics too (Powell 1975; Tabbernee 1985; Trevett 1996: 95–105, 121–9).

After some time of development and fragmentation, the aberrant Trinitarian theology of Montanism became a recurring theme, including accusations of affinity with various brands of Monarchianism (Pelikan 1956: 102–3; Wright 1976: 16; Trevett 1996: 214–23). In its second phase, and in Rome, Hippolytus recounted that early in the third century one (minority?) group of Montanists in Rome had been influenced by the theology of Noetus (*Adv. omn. haer.* 8.19; 10.26; cf. from a later century, Theodoret, *Haereticarum fabularum compendium* 3.2 [PG 83, 401–4]). It is hard to countenance, however, that Tertullian would have aligned himself, just decades after the beginnings of the New Prophecy, with a group which *in general* held to an understanding of God that he would have rejected.

Early Montanism, then, had been in many respects more a determined and discomforting statement of some emphases present already in Asia Minor Christianity than something wholly novel (Aland 1955, 1960a), and it had probably been coloured by distinctively Phrygian religious elements. Opposition had clarified and sharpened its distinctiveness, so that by the time of Pacian of Barcelona (in *Ep. 1 Ad Sympronianum* [PL 13.1053]) Montanists had for long been notorious for their dissenting views about repentance, apostolic and prophetic succession, 'the day of the Passover' (they were probably Quartodeciman in sympathy), authoritative writings, the name 'Catholic', and more. The evidence of Epiphanius, Augustine, Jerome and others suggests that millenarian ideology and respect for the prophetic and other ministries of women had survived, to be part of the teaching of later Montanist groups (Trevett 1995, 1999b; Elm 1996). At this later stage, however, its adherents were referred to variously by names suggestive of their place of origin – Phrygians or Cataphrygians, Pepouzians – or by names which recalled key figures in their past – namely, as Priscillians or Quintillians, as well as Montanists.

Jerome (*Ep. 41 ad Marcellam*) wrote of the revised Montanist order of clergy, with a patriarch (only at Pepouza?) and the other new office of *koinônōs* coming next, leaving bishops in third place. It is clear from such developments that order and hierarchy were not foreign to this group, which should not be seen primarily in terms of reaction to increased clericalisation in the churches. The tombstone of Praÿlios (see Figure 36.1), discovered some 15 kilometres from Philadelphia, is one of several items which refer to such a *koinônōs*. Other inscriptions speak of a probably Montanist bishop, of a female presbyter, an archdeacon and other office-holders (see e.g. Tabbernee 1997a: 509–18).

The fact that Montanist clerical offices (some at least) were open to women in institutionalized Montanism dismayed the Catholic side. There was 'in Christ neither male nor female' (Gal. 3:28) the Quintillianists observed (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 49.2.1–5). Ambrosiaster mentioned women deacons (*Comm. in Ep. 1 ad Tim.* 3.8–11) and Epiphanius bishops and presbyters (*Pan.* 49.2–3; cf. John of Damascus, *De haeresibus* 87). Among the Quintillians, at least, there was regular formalized prophecy during worship, by appointed lamp-bearing virgins dressed in white (*Pan.* 49.2). The tombstone of Stephania (see Figure 36.2), discovered in Galatia, described her as 'one of the five lamp-bearing virgins, the most God-beloved one of Christ' (Tabbernee 1997a: 518–525), and as the leader (*bêgoumenê*) of them.

The New Prophecy, then, may well have begun in a time of anxiety as a movement of renewal, with emphasis on spiritual gifts and eschatological promises (*H. E.* 5.16.9 [Anonymous]; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 48.13.1 [Maximilla]). But Epiphanius' Anonymous source reported an erroneous claim that 'we too must receive the spiritual gifts' (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 48.1.3). They had 'separated from the church because of spiritual gifts' (*Pan.* 48.12.1), he averred. At first, then, the New Prophecy in Asia had not been divorced from Catholic congregations. It had had the capacity to divide them, nevertheless, and ultimately to win some over (e.g. the accounts about Ancyra in Galatia in *H. E.* 5.16.4 [Anonymous] and Thyatira later according to Epiphanius, *Pan.* 51.33). Given the claims to inspiration and authority which went with the prophecy, it was inevitably perceived as a threat.

The early New Prophecy was next sharpened by opposition, rejection and debate

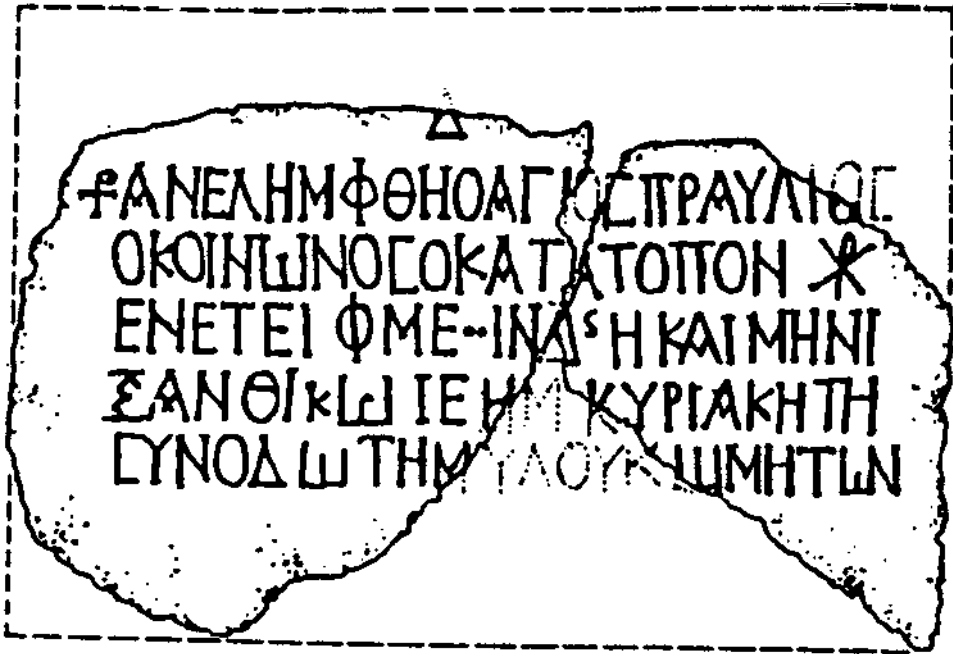


Figure 36.1 Praylios, *koinōnos* inscription. Drawing from Tabbernee (1997a: 510) with the permission of the author and the publisher, Mercer University Press.

into offering a throughgoing critique of aspects of the developing Catholic tradition. Catholics who had rejected the phenomenon soon came to be labelled ‘psychics’, by contrast with the New Prophecy’s *pneumatikoi*, at least to judge from the witness of Tertullian (*Iei.* 1.1; 3.1; 11.1; 16.8; *Pud.* 21–2; *Marc.* 4.22.5; *Mon.* 1.1) and Clement of Alexandria, who noted that Valentinians too used the derogatory word ‘psychics’ of the Catholics (*Strom.* 4.13.93.1). Some later epigraphy from ‘spiritual’ Christians confirms this (Trevett 1996: 203–4; Tabbernee 1997a: 401–6, 544–6, 550–2).

THE DATE OF ITS BEGINNINGS

Eusebius of Caesarea in the *Chronicon* and Epiphanius of Salamis in *Pan.* 48.1.2 offered conflicting dates for the start of the New Prophecy, the latter seeming to suggest c. 157 CE, in the nineteenth year of Antoninus Pius, while Eusebius suggested 171–2, the twelfth year of Marcus Aurelius. The issue is confused by both writers being vague or self-contradictory in respect of other dates and events, and by the claim that Thyatira fell to Montanism at some point hard to establish because Epiphanius, *Pan.* 51.33, is so opaque. The matter is complicated further by the possibility that the martyrology of Polycarp (which may refer to events as early as 156 in date) and the account concerning the martyrs of Vienne and Lyon in 177 CE,

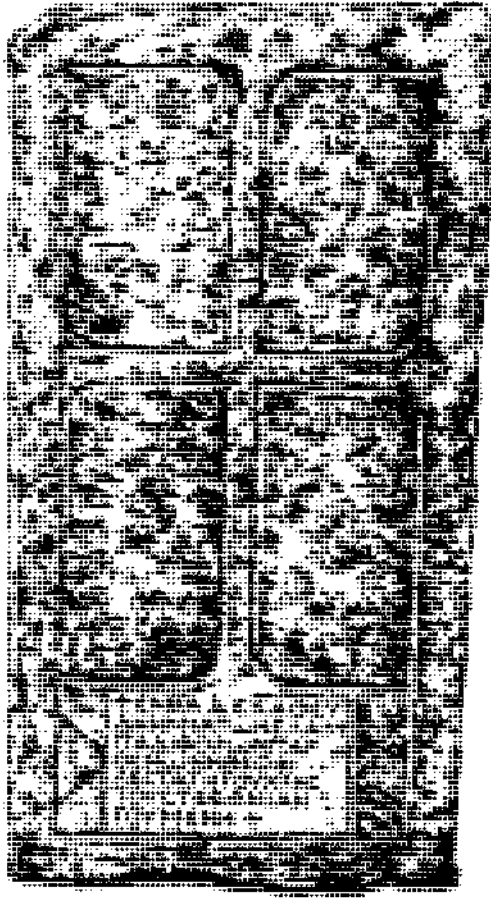


Figure 36.2 Stephania tombstone. Drawing from Tabbernee (1997a: 520), with the permission of the author and the publisher, Mercer University Press.

reflect the need to oppose a Montanist understanding of martyrdom (Kraft 1955; Buschmann 1995).

Eusebius' date, I have argued, probably speaks of the time of increased public awareness of the New Prophecy and of more organized opposition to it, rather than of its beginnings. If, as is posited, Maximilla was the last of the leading prophets (which I call the Three) to die, and she was dead *c.* 180 CE, then 172–80 CE seems too short a span of time for the rise, the considerable expansion, the undoubted influence and the condemnation of the New Prophecy. Its origins may indeed go back to the 150s, as Epiphanius claimed, but its rise should be set in the 160s. Second-century Asia Minor provides evidence for the kinds of eschatological hope which fuelled the New Prophecy (including the Revelation and Papias of Hierapolis) and the events of the 160s onward, which included famine, warfare, occasional persecution and plague, and provided cause for concern about that eschatological 'suffering' (*ponos*) of which Maximilla spoke in her oracle (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 48.13.1):

‘the Lord has sent me to interpret this suffering, covenant and promise as a partisan, a revealer and interpreter’ (Trevett 1997).

THE PLACE OF ITS BEGINNINGS

Montanus had begun his prophesying in a rural backwater. According to Eusebius’ Anonymous (*H. E.* 5.16.7) it had been in Phrygian-Mysia at a place known as Ardabau, though the location of that place, like that of Pepouza which was subsequently the centre of Montanism, is hard to establish.⁶

Quite apart from whether the site of Ardabau was in the region of Kallataba, Atyochorion or elsewhere, the name may have had a symbolic significance as the place of Montanus’ first prophesying. A not dissimilar name features in a vision in the apocalyptic 4 Ezra (2 Esdras). There a promised city would appear and it was after the vision concerning that place that Ezra had functioned as a prophet (Preuschen 1900; Trevett 1996: 21–6, contrast Tabbernee 1997a: 18). Pepouza, which with Tymion was home to a site (or more probably to an ideal community of people) which Montanus designated ‘Jerusalem’ (*H. E.* 5.18.2 [Apollonius]), proved to be the ‘Mecca’ of Montanism for the centuries of its existence. It has been variously located in the vicinity of Hierapolis (modern Pamukkale (see Figure 36.3) or somewhere to the north-west or north-east, towards Philadelphia or Apamea. The present-day villages of Üçkuyu and Bekilli have been suggested as probable sites for both Pepouza and Tymion, but no suggestion has been



Figure 36.3 Remains at Hierapolis (modern Pamukkale), Turkey. Photo Christine Trevett.

verifiable. Other scholars have proposed different sites (Tabbernee 1997a: 27–8, 359, 477).

The earliest New Prophecy may have enjoyed some patronage from Christians in the region of Philadelphia, given that some of its emphases echoed prophetic revelation to that region (Revelation 3:7–13, and see Calder 1923; Trevett 1989, contrast Tabbernee 1997a: 53–4). Quadratus and Ammia, who were listed among the prophets who prefigured the Montanists, were associated with Philadelphia (Eusebius, *H. E.* 5.17.4), while the daughters of Philip (or some of them at least), to whose memory the New Prophets also appealed, had been linked with Hierapolis. To judge from the places of origin of those Catholic leaders who first came to confront the New Prophecy the area of its earliest influence must have been within reasonable distance of Otrous, Cumane, Hierapolis, Apamea and Hieropolis (Eusebius *H. E.* 5.16).

The evidence which survives between the beginnings of Montanism and Firmilian's letter to Carthage in the late 250s CE (but concerning the decade of the 230s) offers a picture of expansion. Within a few decades exponents of the New Prophecy were to be found not just in Phrygia, but in Galatia (where the Christian community in Ancyra was deeply divided by it: Eusebius, *H. E.* 5.16.4 [Anonymous]) in Lydia, Cappadocia, eastwards to Antioch as well as westwards in Thrace (where Priscilla was confronted [*H. E.* 5.19.3], indicating a peripatetic element in the activities of the Three). Possibly some New Prophets had reached Gaul too, to judge from some of the language of the letters to Asia and Phrygia about the martyrdoms in Lyon and Vienne (Eusebius, *H. E.* 5.1.1–5.3.4).

In Hierapolis in Phrygia Salutaris opposition to the New Prophecy was spear-headed by bishop Claudius Apolinarius (Eusebius, *H. E.* 4.27; 5.16.1; 5.19.2; cf. Jerome, *De viris illustribus* 26). The bones of some of the daughters of Philip were there and Catholic writers were soon decrying suggestions that those prophesying women had been anything like the New Prophets.⁷ Nevertheless, the surviving epigraphy of the fourth century and beyond suggests a continued Montanist presence there, as also in the region of Philadelphia (Tabbernee 1997a: 495–511).

Other writers wrote not only of Pepouza's continued existence, but of its being an administrative and spiritual centre (e.g. Filastrius of Brescia, *Div. haer. lib.* 49) for what were marginalized and now (in a Christian empire) *heretical* Montanists (Montanism was mentioned but not condemned at Nicaea).⁸

Montanism had spread rapidly (Tabbernee 1997a: 53–4). Very soon it was firmly an urban as well as a rural phenomenon and so is not to be explained simply as a rural spasm born of peculiarly Phrygian religiosity, or of alliance with Phrygian paganism generally and the cult of Cybele in particular. This is not to deny, of course, the possible influence of non-Christian and local practices during the history of Montanism in Asia in particular, where it survived longest.⁹ Epigraphy provides evidence of communities in Sebaste, Temenothyrai, Dorylaeum/Dorylaeion and the highlands of Phrygia (Tabbernee 1997a: 555–6), but legislation against it must have taken toll of its loyalists and of its vitality. Outside of Asia Minor (Figure 36.4) the most extensive evidence for Montanism has come from North Africa and Rome, though it did not survive so long in those places.

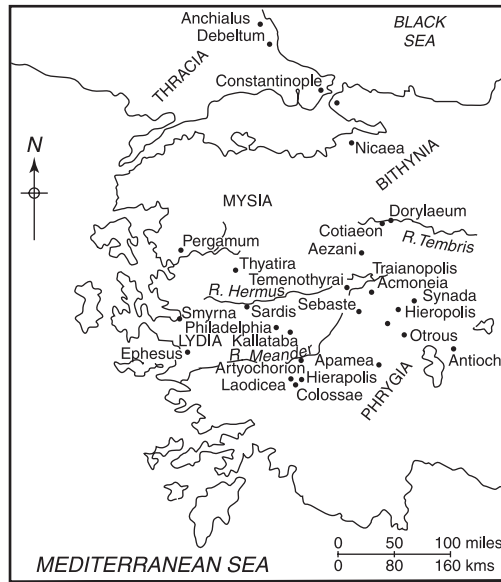


Figure 36.4 Asia Minor and the New Prophecy/Montanism.

MONTANUS, PRISCILLA, MAXIMILLA AND THEIR TEACHINGS

Jensen has tried to show that Montanus was not the originator of this movement but that later writers needed a male heresiarch to append to the New Prophecy. Instead, she maintained, Priscilla should be regarded as its most significant leader and the ‘paraclete’ Montanus should be seen as literally the ‘advocate’ (*paraklêtos*) for the two female prophets (Jensen 1996: 135–8; contrast Trevett 1996: 159–62). The case does not convince. Nevertheless, there is no case for their having been other than his equals in leadership and influence, and the attributable prophetic sayings in early anti-Montanist sources and from Tertullian are mostly from the women.

Later anti-Montanist writers did make of the women spiritual dependants or lesser associates of Montanus. He was even described as having ‘procured’ them, though no sexual impropriety had been alleged at first. Montanism came to be lodged firmly in the register of heresies, and these same women by that time had metamorphosed in Christian rhetoric into mad and dangerous infanticidal whores, or into ‘nobles and rich women’, who had seduced Christian communities with money before introducing the pollution of heresy (Jerome, *Ep.* 33.4 *Ad Ctesiphon*; see Trevett 1998). The reputation of Montanus fared no better.

From the outset non-Montanists had been offended by the recognition of women’s spiritual authority in the New Prophecy. As ‘false’ prophets afflicted by demons, early Montanist women (but not men it would seem) attracted the attention of exorcizing Asian men. Both Maximilla and the unnamed prophetess (who may be a

literary device) described by Firmilian were so confronted (*H. E.* 5.18.13; cf. 5.19.3; Cyprian, *Ep.* 75 [Firmilian]; Trevett 1996: 153–8; 1999a). Montanus, who was probably the first of the Three to die, was accused of lust for leadership (*HE* 5.16.7 [Anonymous]) and of being innovative (*H. E.* 5.18.1 [Apollonius]), but then both he and Maximilla, separately, were said to have committed suicide – further evidence, perhaps, of her demonic possession. This story even the gossipy Eusebian Anonymous doubted, however (*H. E.* 5.16.13).

As for Priscilla, she was jibed at for being titled ‘virgin’ when she was known to have been married and for receiving gifts of money and clothing (*H. E.* 5.18.3–4 [Apollonius]). But it was left to later writers not only to record unsympathetically later Montanist women’s clericalization (McGinn-Moorer 1989; Jensen 1996; Trevett 1996) but also to provide more lurid accounts of the Three, including reference to Montanus’ supposed castration (Jerome following Didymus), his former pagan priesthood, Cataphrygians’ infant-defiling rites and bloody Eucharistic offerings (Praedestinatus, Epiphanius, Jerome, Augustine and others) and the women’s insanity.

The sayings

Given that what we know of these prophets stems almost entirely from hostile sources the extant sayings attributed to them are crucial for any study of Montanism. Past attempts to link Montanism and documents such as the *Didache*, the *Ascension of Isaiah* and the *Odes of Solomon* have made little impact.

The so-called ‘oracles’ of the Three are in some cases attenuated sayings or mere introductory prophetic self-designation formulae. As we have them they stand divorced from their original context, sometimes seeming to be a riposte from an extended debate, and in the majority of cases (those preserved by Tertullian being exceptions) they are presented as ludicrous, offensive or evidence of hubris. Stewart-Sykes (1999), on the other hand, regards the very lack of wordiness as evidence that in some cases a complete saying *has* been preserved, for the prophets would have been rural types and of little education.

A few sayings are unattributed, notably some preserved by Tertullian: *Pud.* 21.7 on refusal to pardon sin, *Fuga* 9.4 on the Spirit exhorting to martyrdom and *Anima* 55.5. The latter partially echoes the sentiments of *Fuga* 9.4 in advocating martyrdom over death in bed or in the complications of childbearing.

Given that in the past hostile descriptions of the prophesying as bizarre, false, demonically inspired and divorced from the proper Christian kind of prophecy were taken at face value, there was relatively little interest in the likeness of the sayings to Christian and non-Christian prophetic forms or to portions of earlier writings echoed imaginatively for a new situation in ‘charismatic exegesis’. Recent study has brought interesting results.¹⁰

Montanus

An element of ‘specialization’ may have characterized these early charismatic leaders, each of which also functioned as a prophet for the community. Montanus was said to

have the Pauline *charism* of administration, though he was a teacher as well (Eusebius, *H. E.* 5.18.2). He had organized gatherings at Pepouza and Tymion and had organized collectors of offerings from among the sympathetic (Eusebius, *H. E.* 5.18.2; cf. 1 Cor. 12:28).

Extant sayings show Montanus uttering prophetic 'I' sayings designed to establish the source and authority of the inspired speech: 'I am the Lord God, the Almighty dwelling in man' and 'Neither angel nor envoy, but I the Lord God the Father have come' (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 48.11; cf. Isa. 63:9). His best-known utterance (which has parallels elsewhere) suggests a context of debate about the nature of inspiration: 'Behold, man is like a lyre, and I flit about like a plectron; man sleeps, and I awaken him; behold, it is the Lord who changes the hearts of men and gives men a heart' (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 48.4).

Montanus' claims to inspiration and his mode of prophesying created alarm. He seemed possessed and prophesied in a frenzied manner, with ecstasy and strange speech as well. Priscilla and Maximilla similarly prophesied in an inappropriate fashion (*H. E.* 5.16.9 [Anonymous]), or so it was reported. One early anti-Montanist writer claimed that he was a recent convert to Christianity (*H. E.* 5.16.7). In later centuries, as has been indicated, Christian writers seized on every element of the exotic. Jerome maintained that Montanus had been 'a castrated and emasculated man' (*ubscisum et semivirum*: [Ep. 41.4]), suggesting devotion to the goddess Cybele. Alternatively, it was suggested that he had been a priest of Apollo (the latter according to the *Dialexis* or *Debate of a Montanist and an Orthodox Christian* [Ficker 1905; Heine 1989a: 123]). Had such claims been correct, the earliest opponents of Montanus would surely have seized on them. Pelikan has discounted all such accusations and has suggested that Montanus had been a presbyter (1971: 97).

The accusation that (some later?) Montanists baptized using an aberrant Trinitarian formula which included Montanus' came from Basil of Caesarea (Ep. 188.1). Remarkably, it seemed to be confirmed by a late fourth-century African inscription from Khenchela (ancient Mascula) in Numidia (Figure 36.5). In this a certain Flavius Avus, *domesticus* (which may indicate membership of an elite military corps), had marked the fulfilment of a promise by the setting up of a marble slab, with AW symbols and graffito: *Flavius Avus, domesticus, has fulfilled what he promised in the name of the father and son {and} the lord Muntanus*.

Though most writers have assumed the inscription to be Montanist, Tabbernee (1997a: 445–52, cf. 534–9) has argued to the contrary, pointing to the local cult of the African martyr Montanus (died 259 CE) whose name may have been pronounced locally as Muntanus. The cult, he suggested, may in fact have been Donatist.

Priscilla

Tertullian called her Prisca, the non-diminutive form of the name, and he wrote of her as being a mouthpiece of the Paraclete (*Res.* 11.2). She may have been the deliverer of the unattributed sayings preserved by Tertullian (a) about martyrdom, which has a special relevance for women: 'Do not wish to die in your beds or in miscarriages and mild fevers, but rather in martyrdom', and (b) which exhorts

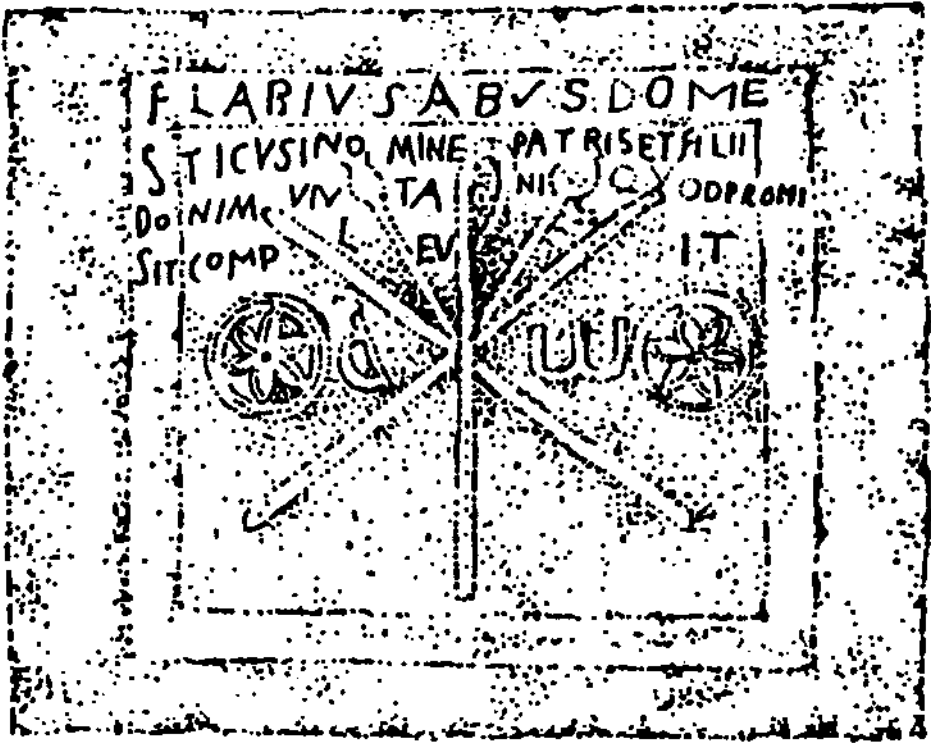


Figure 36.5 Flavius Avus graffito, from Khenchela (ancient Mascula). Drawing from Tabernee (1997a: 446), with the permission of the author and the publisher, Mercer University Press.

against fear of exposure to public gaze and praise, for *righteousness* it was which brought such exposure (*Fuga* 9.4).

Priscilla's parenetic words on those who ministered in holiness told of the church rightly guided by the 'spiritual' (*pneumatikos*) rather than 'psychic' individuals: 'For purification produces harmony . . . and they see visions, and when they turn their faces downward they also hear salutary voices, as clear as they are secret' (Tertullian, *Cast.* 10.5, trans. Heine 1989a). It was a view of Montanist experience which Tertullian shared when he wrote of some women's receipt of visions (by ecstasy) during the church's rites. These were afterwards transmitted to a wider audience (*De anima* 9.4; *Virg.* 17).

Prisca's saying, 'They are flesh yet they hate the flesh' (Tertullian, *Res.* 11), may have belonged in an anti-gnostic or anti-docetic context. It would have been such emphasis, which may be discerned elsewhere in the extant oracles (Davies 1955), together with the increased discipline brought by the New Prophecy, that had attracted Tertullian.

Maximilla

Epiphanius' early Anonymous anti-Montanist source pointed to Maximilla's name and that of other Montanists as evidence of their barbarous cradling (*Pan.* 48.12.3). She may have survived longest of the Three and would have had longer to become infamous. Even so, the evidence of the Eusebian Anonymous suggests that she may have been dead by *c.* 179–80. Her death has come to be regarded as an important point of division between the original New Prophecy and subsequent developments.

Maximilla's utterances about eschatology and her interpretation of 'signs of the times' proved troublesome. The saying on being an interpreter of covenant and suffering has been noted already, and the Eusebian Anonymous told of her predictions of future wars and revolutions (*H. E.* 5.16.18). Time had proved her wrong. There had been peace in the 13 years between her death and his writing!

Another prediction could also be shown to be inaccurate: 'After me there will no longer be a prophet but the end', she had said (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 48.2.4), and of course it had not been so. At the time it must have seemed that with her death any expectation of continued prophecy had been thwarted.

Maximilla's best-known saying reflects the tension engendered by the New Prophecy in Asia: 'I am driven away like a wolf from the sheep', she complained in a saying preserved by Asterius Urbanus via the Anonymous (Eusebius, *H. E.* 5.16.17). 'I am not a wolf. I am word and spirit and power.' The language is reminiscent both of Matthew (7:15) and of Paul's words about his own power in weakness (1 Cor. 2:4). Another saying, 'Do not hear me but hear Christ' (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 48.12.4), illustrates her claim to be a prophetic mouthpiece, though she, like the others, functioned as a teacher also. Epiphanius' Anonymous wrote of her dismissively (*Pan.* 48.13.1) as an alleged fount of exhortation (*parakalouthia*) and teaching (*didaskalia*).

Maximilla, 'driven away' as condemnation of the New Prophecy took hold and proved wrong by events, was also the only one of the Three whose name was not appended to some form of the movement (Montanists, Priscillianists, etc.). I have surmised that in course of time Maximilla's reputation declined and she became marginal in Montanist memory. Like many a new religious movement since, the Montanists of the third and fourth generations onwards may have preferred to forget some of the excesses and wrong judgements of their beginnings (Trevett 1997).

MONTANISM IN NORTH AFRICA

The Montanism of North Africa (especially Carthage) was a second phase of the movement and it is not easy to determine whether and to what extent it resembled the more original Asian kind. Much of what we know of it has been filtered through the idiosyncratic Tertullian, who would have been a loyalist by 207 CE. His witness must be assessed with care before being taken as typical.

Further evidence may be gleaned from the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*. The account had a Montanist redactor who acknowledged new visions, 'new prophecies' and the promise of Joel 2:28–9, while deploring (*Pass. Perp.* 1) those who would limit to 'times and seasons' the gifts and experiences to be described. Some writers

(myself among them) assume that the male and female martyrs themselves (died 203 CE) belonged to the New Prophecy in Carthage (Trevett 1996: 176–84; Tabbernee 1997a: 57–9).

In the arena Perpetua faced the crowd and the beasts ‘in spirit and in ecstasy’ (*Pass. Perp.* 20.8). She and her circle assumed the availability of dreams and visions and hers included a ladder to heaven (dangerously spiked for the unwary and with a dragon at its base: see Figure 36.6), a dream of becoming male and a gladiator for Christ, and a meeting with a shepherd from whom Perpetua took curds to drink. Some have found this reminiscent of the practice of the Artotyrites or ‘bread and cheeses’ mentioned in later anti-Montanist sources such as Epiphanius (*Pan.* 49.1–2) and Augustine (*Haer.* 28).

Then there is Firmilian’s letter to Cyprian in the late 250s CE, with its female prophet who is evidently intended (*pace* Jensen 1996: 182–6) as a description of a Montanist. The account (penned from Caesarea in Cappadocia) may have functioned to promote Asian-type opposition to Montanism in a church (Carthage) where it



Figure 36.6 The Perpetua window from Chester Cathedral. Photo Patricia Jones.

enjoyed a much greater degree of toleration (Trevett 1999a). The Prophecy in Carthage fared differently from elsewhere, perhaps because it *was* different.

Far from being driven out, as had happened in Asia (Fischer 1974, 1977), New Prophets seem to have remained integrated into congregations in Carthage. During and for some time after Tertullian's lifetime there is nothing to suggest their rejection or separation. Tertullian himself remained in the Catholic fold. His descriptions of church life suggest what Powell (1975) called a Montanist *ecclesiola in ecclesia*.¹¹

We know little about African Montanism post-Tertullian, however. The writer dubbed 'Praedestinatus', in *De haeresibus* 1.86, claimed that the so-called 'Tertullianists' of Carthage handed over their basilica to the Catholics in Augustine's time, in the fourth century. Augustine himself (*Haer.* 86) claimed that Tertullian had seceded from Montanism as well as from the Catholic faith, and had created his own 'Tertullianist' sect, which is improbable. The 'Tertullianists' have been taken to be synonymous with Montanists in Africa (Barnes 1971: 258–9; cf. Aland 1960b: 161–3; Powell 1975) or perhaps (Tabbernee 1997a: 475–6) a group post-Tertullian and post-Cyprian which *had* left the Catholic mainstream in Carthage.

Augustine's evidence about Cataphrygians and Quintillians confirms there was distinctive Montanist teaching on the Paraclete (*Contra Faustum* 32.170), digamy, and about women in church offices (cf. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 49.2). It includes accusations of Quintillianist bloody rites, involving the pricking of infants.¹² The fourth century may indeed have been the last one for Montanists in the region. In the middle of it Optatus of Milev in Numidia claimed there were no Montanists in Africa (*Schism. Donat.* 1.9.1), though there were plenty of Donatists and some people may have slid soundlessly from one to the other.

Tabbernee itemizes epigraphy of what has been claimed to be Montanist presence in Africa to the sixth century – though perhaps some is Donatist (Frend 1940, 1980; Tabbernee 1997a: 105–23, 444–51, 534–44).

MONTANISM IN ROME

The New Prophecy probably reached Rome at an early stage in its history. Most things gravitated there.¹³ It was probably strongest among Asiatics in the city and eventually sparked a debate between Proclus the Montanist and Gaius the Catholic, during the episcopacy of Zephyrinus (c. 199–217 CE; Eusebius, *H. E.* 2.25.5–7 and 6.20.3; cf. Pseudo-Tertullian, *Adv. omn. haer.* 7).

Tertullian (*Prax.* 1) claimed that one Roman bishop had recognized the New Prophecy and had penned a peacable letter to Asia and Phrygia before being persuaded of his wrong-headedness by a reminder of his predecessors' different response. Tertullian blamed a *bête noire* nicknamed 'Praxeas' ('busybody'), who had propagandized against the New Prophecy.

Who was the bishop? It is hard to determine. It may have been Eleutherus (174–89), who had received letters of embassy from Gaul in 177 CE. When the Gallic Christians had sent letters of peace to the East, Eleutherus may have decided on similar letters of peace, at least until an Asian anti-Montanist (Praxeas) took action



Figure 36.7 Late second-century statue of Apollo from the arena in Carthage, now in the Bardo Museum in Tunis. Photo Christine Trevett.

on his people's behalf and they were recalled. Both the New Prophets and their enemies may have been canvassing support from many quarters at this time.

In that case it would have been bishop Soter (166–74) who had been among those not recognizing it. Praedestinatus (*Haer.* 1.26) offers some weak and confused evidence in corroboration of this. In any case I find it hard to believe that the tough-minded bishop Victor was the one to give solace to Montanists, albeit briefly (Trevett 1996: 55–60). Other writers have interpreted events quite differently, even in terms of there having been formal excommunication in the past.

As for the New Prophets' teachings in Rome, it seems that their doctrine of the

Paraclete (which Heine took to be a Roman Montanist innovation) caused particular concern (Heine 1987, 1989b; contrast Trevett 1996: 62–6). Rome may indeed have become the seat of opposition to Johannine writing, however, such as worried Irenaeus (*Adversus Haereses* 3.11.12). While he deplored those who claimed to have discovered ‘more than the truth’, he also feared Christians who over-reacted and who would nullify the Spirit’s gift and drive prophecy from the church altogether.

It was Epiphanius in *Pan.* 51.3–34 who made the association between the Roman anti-Montanist Gaius and the so-called Alogi who rejected John’s Gospel and the Apocalypse.¹⁴ Dionysius bar Salibi, in his twelfth-century *Commentary on the Apocalypse* (*Comm. Apoc.* 1), said that Gaius himself had attributed Gospel and Apocalypse to Cerinthus. There is no consensus, however, as to whether Alogism started in Asia or in Rome, though many writers associate it with response to the New Prophecy.

Questions of authority and heritage were in the air. In Rome the two sides debated the merits of apostolic forebears and apostolic and other writings. Hippolytus (Brent 1995) wrote of Montanists’ ‘countless books’ and of their reverence for even the women’s utterances. In response to such things ‘they devise new feasts, fasts and the eating of dry food and cabbage’ (*Refut. omn. haer.* 18.19). Romans and Asiatics defended their traditions and the merits and memorials of their predecessors (Eusebius, *H. E.* 2.25.6–7; 6.20.3; cf. 3.31.2–5; 5.24; Tabbernee 1997b).

Montanism survived longer in the East than in the West where (Rome excepted perhaps) it had ceased by the end of the fourth century (Aland 1960b: 149–50; Tabbernee 1978: 402). The increasingly Christianized empire could not tolerate it (Trevett 1996: 223–32), and Jerome wrote scathingly of Montanism to the Roman Marcella (*Ep.* 41), naming Sabellianism as its chief fault. Montanists were certainly still in Rome at the end of the fourth century. Praedestinatus (*Haer.* 1.86) told of a ‘Tertullianist’ priest establishing a *collegium* there, thanks to the patronage of an influential African woman. But they would not have enjoyed peace for long, given that Honorius, the western emperor, passed legislation against Montanists and ordered the burning of books (*Cod. Theod.* 16.5.4). The bishop of Rome, Innocent I (402–17) also allegedly exiled some Cataphrygians to an unnamed monastery.

Some of the Roman epigraphy seems to confirm the existence of Montanist communities in Rome in that long period of silence after Hippolytus, though Tabbernee is sceptical about certain items (Tabbernee 1997a: 124–32; 452–68; 544–52). Some inscriptions used the term *pneumatikos*, and like earlier analysts Tabbernee argued for a thriving Montanist community of Asiatic origin in the late fourth century, and especially in the region of the Via Aurelia.

WHAT WRITERS HAVE SAID ABOUT MONTANISM

The Protestant–Catholic divide, which once characterized scholarship about Montanism, is now much less in evidence. Protestants more readily saw the New Prophecy as promoting renewal or trying to safeguard aspects of ‘original’ Christianity. *Charismata* were being marginalized, some suggested, even though gifts of the spirit continued to be exercised in many Christian congregations at the time (Campenhausen 1969; Pelikan 1971: 99–100).

Montanism and Gnosticism have been seen as the forces over against which the emerging Catholic tradition defined itself and, in respect of Gnosticism, Catholics and Montanists would have been on the same side (Davies 1955; contrast Froehlich 1973). Since as early as Arnold at the end of the seventeenth century the New Prophecy was seen as a force to stem the tide of secularization in the churches (de Soyres 1878; Bonwetsch 1881 [an important source for information on earlier commentators]; Harnack 1883), while others have written of the struggle of prophetic (including female prophetic) power against that of the clerical kind.

The debt of Montanism to paganism (especially Phrygian paganism) has been a theme since the writing of August Neander (1828), who investigated possible links between the New Prophecy and aspects of the cults of Attis and Cybele. But it was William Ramsay (1895–7) who looked to the possibility of influence from a distinctively Phrygian church, Phrygian society and Phrygian paganism. Anti-Montanist writers may have deliberately hinted at paganization. Klawiter (1975: 129–41) noted parallels between the descriptions of the prophet Montanus and the language and ideas of Lucian's satire of Alexander of Abonuteichos (who was also active in the decade of the 160s). But had pagan influence been thoroughgoing it would surely have been condemned explicitly at an early stage.

These things apart, the firmly *Christian* and more specifically *Asian* Christian, character of the early New Prophecy has been widely acknowledged.¹⁵ Schepelern (1929) found occasional local pagan influences, observable in practices mentioned in later anti-Montanist sources, but the same was true of Asian Christianity generally, he observed.

In nineteenth-century scholarship the tensions between the Montanists and other Christians were sometimes portrayed in terms of a Jewish Christian (Montanist) versus gentile Christian stance. Theories of the debt of Montanism to Ebionism (popularized by the Tübingen school in particular) have been abandoned, but more recently Ford (1966) has pointed to particular parallels with Qumran, the Karaites and the Therapeutae which to her suggest that Montanism was 'Jewish Christian'.

Twentieth-century scholarship has seen more interest in conflicts of culture, in the possibly nationalist or 'rural uneducated' versus 'urban sophisticated' element in the rise of groups such as Montanists and Donatists (Frend 1979, 1988a, 1988b, 1994; Stewart-Sykes 1999) as well as in the political dimension of apocalyptic thought (Grant 1970: 142), in the role of women in Montanism,¹⁶ in analysis of the prophecy and its condemnation, in competing trajectories of Pauline Christianity (McGinn-Moorer 1989) and in the substantial body of possibly Montanist epigraphy.

There are now several collections of disparate literary *Testimonia* and epigraphy. These include the surviving 'oracles' of its prophets which are enumerated differently in different lists (Trevett 1996: 248–9, after Froehlich 1973: 96). They include Labriolle (1913a), Heine's (1989a) compilation and English translation (which omitted 96 items studied by Labriolle), Huber (1985: 218–22) and Aland (1960a) on the oracles. William Tabbernee's substantial study of Montanist and allegedly Montanist epigraphy (1997a, and 1978: 626–724) includes comprehensive references to all earlier important nineteenth- and twentieth-century work, and he finds that the evidence from what is now Turkey, from North Africa and Italy, is in many cases less certainly Montanist than has been claimed.

Finally, several of the studies referred to above include reflections on trends in scholarship (Klawiter 1975; Trevett 1996; Tabbernee 1997). McGinn-Moorer (1989) is the most comprehensive.

NOTES

- 1 See Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.16.4; cf. 14 (Anonymous); 5.19.2 (Serapion of Antioch).
- 2 See *Adversus Marcionem* 3.24.4; 4.22.4; *De resurrectione carnis* 63.9; *Adversus Praxean* 30.5; *De monogamia* 14.4.
- 3 See Epiphanius' Anonymous in *Pan.* 48.11.5–6; Hippolytus, *Refut. omn. haer.* 8.19; Tertullian, *De anima* 55.5; *De virginibus velandis* 1.8 and 10; *De res. carn.* 11.2; Pseudo Tertullian, *Adv. omn. haer.* 7; Origen, *Princ.* 2.7.3; Didymus, *De trinitate* 3.41.1.
- 4 See Campenhausen (1969: 18), Ash (1976), Burghardt (1979), McGinn-Moorer (1989: 3–6) and Trevett (1996: 90–1).
- 5 See e.g. *Virg.* 1.5 and 8; *Res.* 11; *Mon.* 2.1. 4 and 10; 15.1–3; *De pudicitia.* 1; *De Exhortatione Castitatis* 6.2; *De ieiunio* 15.
- 6 See Strobel (1980: 38–49), Mitchell (1984: 226–7), Trevett (1996: 19–26), and Tabbernee (1997a: 18, 53).
- 7 See *H. E.* 5.17.2–3 (Alcibiades, but Miltiades is intended); cf. too Origen, *Catena* (Heine 1989a: 99); Didymus, *Trin.* 3.41.3; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 49.2.
- 8 See Jerome, *Ep.* 84.4; Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.13.7; Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.18. See also Sozomen, *H. E.* 2.32.2; Eusebius, *Vita Const.* 3.64–5; Canon 8 of the Council of Laodicea; *Codex Theod.* 16; and Trevett (1996: 198–209; 214–32).
- 9 See Freeman (1950), Goree (1980), Strobel (1980), Dauntton-Fear (1982), Frend (1988b, 1994) and Elm (1996).
- 10 See Blanchetière (1979), Aune (1983), Groh (1985), Forbes (1986), Elm (1994), Trevett (1996), McGinn (1997) and Stewart-Sykes (1999).
- 11 See Lawlor (1908), Robeck (1992), van der Lof (1991), Rankin (1995) and Tabbernee (1997a: 54–5, 142).
- 12 See Augustine, *Haer.* 26–27; cf. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 48.14–15. See Trevett (1995) and Elm (1996).
- 13 See Klawiter (1975: 191–243), La Piana (1925), Lampe (1989) and Trevett (1996: 55–66).
- 14 See Labriolle 1913a: lxxii–lxxiii, lxxx, Bludau (1925), Paulsen (1978: 25–7), Heine (1987, 1989b) and Trevett (1996: 139–41).
- 15 See Kraft (1955), Aland (1955, 1960a), McGinn-Moorer (1989), Tabbernee (1978, 1997b), Trevett (1996) and Stewart-Sykes (1999b).
- 16 See Fiorenza (1983: 300–3), Huber (1985), McGinn-Moorer (1989) and Trevett (1996).

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DONATISM



James Alexander

INTRODUCTION: THE ORIGINS AND PERSISTENCE
OF DONATISM

The history of the schism may be swiftly sketched. It arose from different reactions among Christians in Roman Africa to the last and greatest persecution of the church, under the emperor Diocletian (303–5). A central feature of this persecution was the imperial demand that Christians hand over scriptures to the authorities. Some remained conspicuously loyal to a long-standing tradition of no compromise with pagan religion, which was seen as idolatrous, and provocatively made public their encouragement of those ready to die in defiance of imperial edicts which forbade Christian worship, confiscated bibles, and demanded ritual sacrifice to the gods of Rome. In particular, they refused to engage in *traditio*, ‘handing over’, of the scriptures. Others, meanwhile, advocated prudence, even at the risk of ostensible compromise, to the extent of becoming actual or apparent *traditores* of scriptures, as the best way for the church to survive this threat to its existence and emerge from the crisis with the least damage done. A vacancy in the see of Carthage, caused by the death of Mensurius (probably early in 307 CE) transformed those two groups into two rival parties, each with its own claimant to Africa’s primatial see. Donatus (from whom Donatism gets its name) represented the former, rigorous group, and Caecilian the latter. Constantine, the emperor before whom the case was brought on appeal in 316, ended a long legal wrangle by ruling in favour of Caecilian, thus confirming the earlier decisions of church councils at Rome (313) and Arles (314). However, failure to reconcile the dissidents, ably led by Caecilian’s rival Donatus, brought grudging toleration in 321 to the party-in-opposition. So the church in Roman Africa remained divided for over a century.

Eventually, there were few areas without two bishops, each at the head of his own people or congregation, in every city, town and tiny village. Notable among attempts to end the schism was a state-sponsored effort under the emperor Constans in the mid-340s which included a generous distribution of alms, but resulted in the massacre of many Donatists, so making reconciliation of the opposing parties all the more difficult. But Donatism was weakened in 393 by an internal split, when it lost perhaps almost a quarter of its support to the Maximianist schism. Numerically, this

now put the two main parties more or less on an equal footing. Attempts towards reunification were, at the same time, given new impetus by the ingenuity and determination of Augustine, bishop of Hippo. These culminated in a full legal inquiry set up by the emperor Honorius in 411, the so-called Conference of Carthage, after which stringent measures of coercion were, as far as the evidence allows us to say, effectively enforced against the Donatists. The Vandal conquest of Africa, not long after, may possibly have been conducive to unity against a common foe but, more likely perhaps, by ending, at least for a century, the Catholic political ascendancy in Africa it may have facilitated the survival of Donatism as a separate entity. At any rate, a rump of Donatist non-conformity appears to have persisted to the time of Gregory the Great.

Donatism raises some important issues, two of which will be considered in turn here. Firstly, the extent to which religious disputes often seem to merge with divisions along ethnic, economic, social or political lines. And secondly, the possibility of the co-existence of alternative views of the nature of the church. Both of those aspects are relevant to what answer we might choose to give to one simple question: why did Donatism last so long?

THE INTERRELATIONSHIP OF RELIGIOUS, ETHNIC, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES

Special conditions in Roman Africa

Compare the Donatist schism in Africa with the Melitian schism in Egypt (Frend [1952] 1972: 22–4). Both arose in the early fourth century under apparently similar conditions, in the aftermath of the persecution of the church under the emperor Diocletian. Both centred on disagreement over the terms of rehabilitation of church members and particularly of clergy who had lapsed, either by surrendering copies of the scriptures on demand to the persecuting authorities (*traditio*) or by performing some ostensible act of conformity with pagan ceremonial rites (*sacrificatio*, *turificatio*), regrettable, if perhaps necessary, compromises in the circumstances, yet regarded by most Christians as constituting a public betrayal of the faith. Some were quick to cast themselves in the role of upholders of the faith over against those who had betrayed it, insisting that the lapsed could be reinstated to full communion only after a suitably long period among the ranks of the penitent and that lapsed clergy should be reduced to the status of laymen. An apostate priest was no longer worthy of office in the church. If he presumed to continue his duties, his sacraments were null and void and those who remained in communion with him merely implicated themselves in his apostasy by condoning it. Thus, Caecilian of Carthage was held by his critics to have become implicated in apostasy by receiving his consecration as bishop from known apostates. His opponents therefore consecrated another, Majorinus, who was soon succeeded by Donatus, rival bishop of Carthage from c. 313 to c. 355. But there were others, who did not share the view of the rigorist party and who, in view of the large number of lapsed Christians, urged less delay in their re-admission to the church and were even

prepared to excuse compliant clergy by covering up their guilt or explaining it away.

So why, then, was Donatism so long-lived in Africa, while in Egypt the Melitian schism died off within a few years? In each case a similar cause of disagreement on the religious level obviously did not produce similar results, at least in the long term. Part of the explanation for the longevity of Donatism has therefore been sought beyond the religious sphere in the local conditions of Roman Africa. Observing that the main concentration of Donatist churches occurred within a particular area, the high plains of central Numidia, William Frend argued that Donatism represented a reaction of native Berber culture against the process of Romanization, a reassertion of regional identity lost through political absorption in the Roman empire, the protest of an impoverished rural population against the prosperity of the towns and cities, the main centres of Roman culture and influence (Frend [1952] 1972).

Town and country

It seems clear that while its main power-base lay in central Numidia, Donatism was well supported throughout North Africa. Augustine's anti-Donatist polemic stressed that his own side, the North African Catholics, had succeeded in winning official recognition from the rest of the church, whose increasingly world-wide communion could be seen as the fulfilment of the church's promised universality through the preaching of the gospel to all nations. By contrast, the Donatist faction was confined to a corner of Africa. Fortunately, we can check the accuracy of Augustine's characterization of Donatism as essentially a Numidian affair by looking at the lists of bishops from each side attending the Carthage Conference in 411. Already employed by William Frend ([1952] 1972), and again assessed by Serge Lancel, this evidence gives a good picture, since each side wished to demonstrate numerical superiority over the other in terms of their bishops and the congregations they represented — as the roll was called at the opening session of the Conference each bishop identified himself and acknowledged where he had his see (Lancel 1972–91: I, 107–90). The tally of Catholic and Donatist bishops was not much less than three hundred each, with the Donatists marginally in the majority. Although the precise location and the size and importance of a number of sees remains doubtful, the overall picture which emerges shows the Donatists not only in the ascendant in Africa's western provinces, Numidia and Mauretania, but holding their own in the eastern provinces as well, Byzacena and Tripolitana, except for the most important part associated with Carthage itself, the proconsular province, where the Catholics enjoyed a clear majority. In other words, Donatism is not so easily identifiable with its Numidian heartland as Augustine's polemic might lead us to expect. Further, each side at the Conference accused the other of having artificially increased the number of its bishops by a regular policy of subdividing what had formerly been one see into two or even three, upgrading rural congregations to the position of episcopal sees which would normally have been centred in a city or town. What often seems to have happened is that in a town where both parties maintained rival bishops, as changing circumstances enabled one bishop to gain the upper hand, his

rival would be obliged to retreat to the country and set up a temporary see in a nearby village, no doubt in the hope of returning to his old see at some more favourable opportunity. Or again, where one side held undisputed sway, the other might be tempted to enter a challenge by installing a bishop or even a presbyter with a token congregation, either in the town itself where the existing bishop had his see or not too far away in the surrounding countryside. The episcopal lists at the Conference show that both sides had sees in country areas, the Donatists probably more than the Catholics, but that the former were as much in evidence as the latter in the towns and cities. The attempt therefore to represent Donatism as the religion of a less Romanized and underprivileged countryside, as opposed to that of the more prosperous centres of urban life and culture, requires qualification. It is also worth noting that in the case of Africa the contrast between town and country should not be exaggerated. Unlike Egypt, where the Greek cities stood out starkly against a native rural background, the process of urbanization had penetrated deeply in Roman Africa, which included a few larger centres of population, such as Carthage itself, the capital, or Hippo Regius, Augustine's see, and a large number of smaller units, most of them enjoying civic status (Février 1966: 235; cf. 1964: 1–47).

Local culture

Urbanization went hand in hand with Romanization, which also seems to have been pretty thorough, even if not quite complete. The suggestion of a native Berber culture reasserting itself against the culture of the conqueror and finding a useful ally in Donatist non-conformity, comes up against two main difficulties. First, the language in which the controversy was conducted was exclusively Latin and the leading protagonists on the Donatist side – Donatus himself; his successor, Parmenian; the biblical exegete Tyconius; Petilian, fifth-century bishop of Cirta in central Numidia; Cresconius the grammarian; Emeritus of Mauretanian Caesarea; Gaudentius of Timgad in Numidia, to name the most notable – even if they lack the rhetorical brilliance of Augustine, are as representative of the Roman culture of their age as their Catholic counterparts. Second, the term 'Berber' is used by modern scholars to refer to what is assumed to be a continuous cultural and linguistic tradition stretching back in North Africa to before the Carthaginian empire. While there is some inscriptional evidence indicating the use in North Africa in Roman times of a script, though not necessarily a spoken language, other than Punic or Latin, it seems clear that Punic, the language of the earlier Carthaginian empire, was the main alternative to Latin in Augustine's time (Millar 1968: 126–34). We hear of Augustine's Donatist counterpart in Hippo having his sermon relayed through an interpreter on one occasion to a congregation which included visiting members who understood Punic but not Latin. We also hear of Augustine's own concern that Catholic clergy in Punic-speaking rural areas should be competent in that language. So Punic at least appears to have presented equal problems of communication for the Romanized leadership of either side. Such evidence suggests that Punic-speakers were, by the time of Augustine, limited to certain rural areas, even perhaps that they represented only a marginal group in North African society, and that Latin was the language of most church members as well as their leaders, whether

Catholic or Donatist, who used it as their principal means of instruction and polemic.

Political disaffection

Politically, fourth-century North Africa was administered through officials responsible to a central government, where overall power was divided between co-emperors based at Constantinople in the East and, successively, at Rome, then Milan, and finally Ravenna in the West, and was exercised through a vast, complex machine of civil servants and military personnel. The principle of dynastic succession provided for most of the fourth century a reasonably successful transference of power from one set of rulers to the next. There were of course opportunities of advancement for good military leaders, who knew that a timely bid for power could often succeed. In Africa two such attempts were made by Roman commanders of Moorish stock, indeed, of the same family: Firmus in the 370s and Gildo in the 390s. The rebellion of Firmus was quickly dealt with, but Gildo ruled Africa for a number of years. Arguing against the Donatists Augustine does not hesitate to suggest – at least for the sake of argument – that their loyalty to the Roman government was compromised through their association with Firmus and Gildo in turn. So was Donatism linked to a reassertion of regional political identity, a reaction led by native military commanders against the Roman empire itself?

There is little evidence that either Firmus or Gildo wished for more than positions of power within the imperial structure (Tengström 1964: 79–90). They do not appear to have wanted to undermine that structure itself. It was rather the case that their self-promotion failed to win the official approval for which they hoped and so they found themselves treated as usurpers. This enabled Augustine to mock Donatist links with Roman military officials who came to be branded as rebels. So what were those links? In the case of Firmus, the Donatist bishop of Rusubbicari, a coastal town in Caesarean Mauretania, was responsible for negotiating its terms of capitulation to Firmus near the start of his campaign: the terms were said to have allowed his soldiers to pillage the property of the Catholics of the town, while sparing its Donatist inhabitants. This incident, Augustine claims, earned for the Donatists the nickname ‘Firmiani’, for supporting Firmus. This is Augustine’s response to the Donatist labelling of Catholics as ‘Macariani’, followers of Macarius, for their complicity in the notorious massacre of Donatists under that Roman official in the mid-340s. Clearly, Augustine’s polemical purpose here must be given due weight in determining the extent to which Donatists may be said to have condoned rebellion against the central Roman authorities through supporting Firmus. Second, in the case of Gildo’s revolt, Augustine concentrates on the extent to which the Donatist bishop Optatus of Timgad, in Numidia, was involved. Gildo’s control of Africa (386–98) may indeed have favoured the Donatists, at least when compared with the close cooperation which existed a few years later between the representatives of the central government and the Catholic episcopate in implementing a policy of legal repression against the African schismatics. Augustine accuses bishop Optatus of taking unscrupulous advantage of the situation under Gildo to promote Donatist interests by methods of intimidation, involving a class of religious fanatics and

trouble-makers known as circumcellions, a phenomenon to be discussed presently. It was rumoured, Augustine informs us, that when Gildo was eventually executed as a rebel, bishop Optatus died in prison as one of his chief satellites. It may be that Optatus was able to exploit the favour of Gildo as chief military official in Africa in his time in much the same way as Augustine himself later fostered a relationship beneficial to the Catholic side with successive Roman officials of high rank who served in Africa. It was unfortunate for the Donatists that the official under whom they benefited most came to be branded a rebel. But this hardly means the Donatists in general were hostile to Rome.

There is in Donatist literature, particularly in their martyr-acts (accounts of the suffering and death of Donatists, with the connivance of their Catholic opponents, at the hands of Roman officials) a fair amount of adverse criticism of the Roman empire. Its rulers, agents of the Devil, have always persecuted the church (*Passio Marculi* 3 [Maier 1987: 278]; *Passio Isaac et Maximiani* 8 [Maier 1987: 267]). This is really saying no more than earlier accounts of the Christian martyrs, but the Donatists are still making the point when almost everyone else was ready to applaud Eusebius of Caesarea's eulogy of the Christian emperor as a divinely appointed agent in God's plan of salvation for humanity. That was not how things seemed to the Donatists, who claimed to be upholding the authentic tradition of the early church, yet found themselves labelled schismatics and heretics for refusing to conform to the official church. It is worth noting however that, like Tertullian before them, the Donatists were not opposed to the empire as such, but rather to its persecution of the church, and they were even more bitterly opposed to their Catholic opponents, who appeared to encourage such persecution. In an 'open' pastoral letter of about the year 400, Petilian, Augustine's contemporary and a leading protagonist on the Donatist side, tags on to a traditional list of persecuting emperors the names of successive Roman officials responsible for persecuting Donatists. He wishes to show the Donatists in direct succession to the church of old, still fruitful in martyrs. But, like Tertullian, it is the local government agents he takes as the target of criticism. Significantly, he does not directly blame the emperor Constantine and his successors. For Petilian, professedly Christian emperors had been misled by the opponents of Donatism into dismissing their sect as a deviant form of the faith and a threat to unity. It is notable how persistent Donatist leaders were in their efforts to persuade successive emperors of this misapprehension. As the emperors, after all, did not, throughout the fourth century, adhere to a wholly consistent position on Arianism, it was not entirely unreasonable for the Donatist leaders to continue to believe in the possibility of imperial favour for their faction. The nearest they came to it was under the 'apostate' Julian, a fact which led Augustine to respond that the Donatists could find favour only with pagan emperors. Yet in Africa, an important province in political and economic terms, it was the Donatists who probably formed an overall majority of the population. Petilian therefore had some cause for optimism and would no doubt have welcomed a change in imperial policy. So he was careful to speak of Constantine and his successors, if not as Christian, then as wanting to become so. It only required that they should cease to be misled by the hostile critics of Donatism (Augustine, *Contra litteras Petiliani* 2.92.202). In the light of this we can see that the sense in which the Donatists continued an out-dated posture into

the post-Constantinian age – that of a church of the martyrs set over against a hostile and persecuting empire – was tempered by a readiness for rapprochement.

Economic grievance, social unrest and the circumcellions

How far did the Donatist schism provide a convenient channel in an autocratic state for the expression of economic and social discontent? To what extent did it embody the protest of an increasingly impoverished rural population against economic exploitation by those, in both church and state, with powerful vested interests in the Roman empire – a protest which was, in the main, couched in the language of religious controversy? Should we, for example, picture the Donatist leaders facing a similar situation to that of Martin Luther, confronted in 1525 with a Peasants' Revolt inspired by the dreams of millenarian religion and the demands of social justice (Büttner and Werner 1959: 52–68)?

North Africa was one of the most prosperous regions of the Roman empire and, after the diversion of the Egyptian corn supply from Rome to Constantinople in the fourth century, it became the main source of cheap food for the older capital, with what appear to have been increasingly disadvantageous consequences for local tenant-farmer and peasant producers. Such conditions would naturally have been conducive to economic and social discontent.

Against the Donatists, Augustine makes a great deal of the fact that they were involved in one way or another with a mysterious class of people known as '*circumcelliones*' to their critics, as '*agonistici*' to their friends. Of the former Augustine provides an etymological explanation: this group got their nickname for 'going around buildings in the countryside seeking the means of their own sustenance' (*hoc genus hominum . . . uictus sui causa cellas circumiens rusticanas: Contra Gaudentium* 1.28.32). His explanation is intended to be derogatory, for he wishes to emphasize their terrorism of the countryside and their irresponsible idleness from agricultural labour. But even if we may perhaps suspect that here Augustine is making up a convenient etymology to suit his case, his derivation of the name presumably still corresponds to some typical aspect of their activity. Optatus, Catholic bishop of Mileu, writing some time between 364 and 367, provides the classic description of the circumcellions. He notes three distinctive features. First, they were always on the move, wandering about from one place to another, though they could be found frequenting the marketplaces. Second, they were disruptive of the social order, intimidating creditors into cancelling debts, sometimes to very large amounts, and on occasion they even reversed the role of master and slave, making it unsafe to travel, when the master might find himself thrown out of his carriage and made to run in front of his own slaves seated in their master's place. Third, they were religious, at least in the sense of being fanatically devoted to the ideal of martyrdom, taking it to suicidal extremes by getting someone to kill them or throwing themselves from cliffs. The much more complimentary title '*agonistici*' given to this group by the Donatists themselves indicates their role as soldiers of Christ engaged in religious warfare, supremely exemplified by the Christian martyrs.¹ Augustine often reiterates Optatus' characterization, but fills it out with a considerable amount of circumstantial detail from the late fourth and early fifth centuries, especially from

his experience of the circumcellions in his own diocese around Hippo. Augustine shows their tactics of intimidation were aimed chiefly in reprisal for the legal takeover of Donatist church buildings by their Catholic opponents, or in retaliation against laity and particularly clergy who transferred their allegiance from the Donatist to the Catholic side (Diesner 1960: 497–508). In one typical incident, the circumcellions gave the ex-Donatist and now Catholic bishop of Bagai, a traditional Donatist stronghold in Numidia, such a severe beating that his wounds were still visible for inspection at the emperor's court when he accompanied a delegation of Catholic bishops to Ravenna in Italy to plead for stronger repressive measures against the Donatist church. The story lost nothing in the telling, from the unceremonious smashing of the wooden altar under which the unfortunate bishop of Bagai had taken refuge from attack by circumcellions to the final humiliating disposal of the victim in the middle of the night on a rubbish tip, where he lay unconscious till found by a passer-by (*Contra Cresconium* 3.43.47). In fact, the charge of circumcellion terrorism was influential in bringing about a renewal of anti-Donatist legislation in 405. The edict of 412 which finally confirmed the illegality of Donatism lists the circumcellions near the bottom of the social scale, as liable to a relatively less severe fine than better-off ranks of society if convicted of supporting the Donatist cause – they are placed between the plebeian order and slaves or peasant workers (*Codex Theodosianus* 16.5.52). This suggests that, for the purpose of this edict at least, they were a socially identifiable group of relatively modest means. About ten years later, Augustine claims this legal pressure against Donatism as a whole had had the beneficial result of ridding a significant number of circumcellions both of their name and of the notorious deeds associated with it, by inducing them to take up useful employment in the fields (*Gaud.* 1.29.33).

Who then were the circumcellions? They have been variously understood by modern commentators, with emphasis either on economic grievance or religious fanaticism, although of course those two things need not be taken as mutually exclusive. As a social entity they can be seen either as an economically underprivileged group of agricultural labourers rebelling against harsh conditions or, alternatively, as a religious group, associated with ascetic practices, but especially with fanatical devotion to the ideal of martyrdom. In favour of the former view it is argued that, no longer able to sustain a livelihood by working in the fields, the circumcellions may have taken to roaming the countryside living off what they could steal from one barn after another (Monceaux 1912–23: IV, 180). Or again they may have been farmworkers whose constant mobility was determined by the nature of their seasonal work: they may have gone from farm to farm as casual labourers, who remained unemployed for most of the year, but presented themselves for work at the time of the wheat or olive harvest (Saumagne 1934: 351–64). In either case, the ‘buildings’ in Augustine's expression, quoted above, ‘going around buildings in the countryside’, are understood to mean ‘farm buildings’ or ‘barns’. So it is possible to envisage them driven by economic hardship and an excess of apocalyptic zeal to attempt to introduce by violent methods a greater measure of social justice and frequently ending up martyrs for the cause. But while nothing is known of their millenarian views, what has sometimes been interpreted as a laudible concern for social justice may have been no more than skilful tactics of intimidation. Donatist

writers sometimes identify their party with the innocent poor who suffer oppression at the hands of the rich. It may therefore have suited them to make common cause with the economically and socially deprived in contemporary North African society (Brisson 1958: 325–410). But it is important to note that the Donatists consistently apply this biblical theme to disparage the Catholic opposition in a very precise sense. Through the deceit of riches the Devil has won his way into their hearts in the form of imperial patronage of the Catholic party and now, having entered the Christian fold as a wolf in sheep's clothing, he persecutes the true Christians, the Donatists, more subtly and effectively than ever before (*Passio Donati* 3 [Maier 1987: 204]).

The second line of interpretation sees the circumcellions primarily, but not necessarily only, in religious terms, whether as ascetics or would-be martyrs. The suggestion that they may have been monks of some sort depends mainly on a passage in which Augustine draws an unfavourable comparison between Donatist circumcellions and Catholic monks. The establishment of monasticism in Africa on an organized basis was something for which Augustine himself seems to have been largely, if not solely, responsible. The Donatists made fun both of the institution and of its name, but this was part of their attempt to discredit Augustine. The so-called '*agonistici*', as the Donatists preferred to call the circumcellions, may indeed, Augustine acknowledges, derive their name from the Bible (2 Tim. 4:7), but they do not live up to it because the 'contest' in which they engage is far from 'good': Donatist circumcellions are to Catholic monks as drunk men to sober, foolhardy to prudent, the irresponsible to the innocent, vagabonds to a settled community (*Enarrationes in Psalmos* 132.3 and 6; see Calderone 1967: 94–109; Frend 1969: 542–9). Augustine's comparison would gain much in piquancy if the circumcellions did actually make some pretension to ascetic virtue. Elsewhere he mentions them recruiting to their number widows and virgins who had consecrated themselves to a life of continence. Possidius, Augustine's colleague and biographer, in fact refers to the circumcellions' 'supposed profession of continence' (*Vita* 10.1.22). Monks who wandered about from one monastery to the next, sampling the life but never settling down to take it seriously and frequently getting into mischief, were a common object of criticism for Augustine and other church leaders of his time. The circumcellions might therefore be understood as mendicant ascetics and Augustine's description of them 'going about buildings in the countryside' interpreted as 'going the rounds of monastic cells situated in the country'. Some Eastern ascetics are known to have taken self-mortification to suicidal extremes, while others are described as embracing the cause of the socially and economically aggrieved, including arranging the cancellation of debtors' bonds. It should of course be noted that this was always a matter of righting individual wrongs, not of implementing social reforms on a grand scale.

But any ascetic tendencies on the part of the circumcellions may perhaps best be understood in association with their role as martyrs. In that case perhaps they represented the religiously zealous wing of Donatism, disciplined by asceticism and dedicated to martyrdom. A fourth-century inscription from Mauretania including the phrase 'martyrs' shrine' supports the view that Augustine's expression 'going around buildings in the countryside' meant that the circumcellions, for the sake of

their own sustenance, went about 'country shrines' dedicated to martyrs. That such shrines existed in the North African countryside is clear from both literary and archaeological evidence. The Catholic bishop Optatus describes whitewashed memorial slabs marking the graves of circumcellion martyrs. These were in the form of altars or tables suitable for the martyrs' commemoration with the traditional anniversary feast. Archaeology confirms examples of altars or tables erected in the open air, usually in cemeteries and confined to a special section, and also of martyrs' tombs in or adjoining churches (Optatus 3.4; Duval 1982: II, 458–64, 525–42). Augustine often describes the orgies of the circumcellions in celebration of the martyrs, so the food and drink available on the occasion of martyrs' festivals may have been one reason for their behaviour – 'going round martyrs' shrines in the country for the sake of their own sustenance'. It is clear that the martyr-cult formed a vital element in popular Christian piety, which was difficult for church leaders to keep within reasonable bounds, and Augustine preached many a sermon against the excesses of revelry which characterized the Catholic observance of this custom (cf. *Ep.* 29.11). The Donatists, of course, who saw themselves pre-eminently as a church of the martyrs, a church which, in their own words, 'suffers but does not inflict persecution', had a special reason for upholding this tradition. While most Christians were content to venerate the martyrs at the safe distance of commemorative festivals, the Donatists, as a persecuted sect, continued to experience martyrdom as a gruesome reality. The line between suicide and martyrdom, between dying in a good cause and a bad, was often hard to draw clearly and depended very much on whose side you happened to be on. The Donatist leaders, however, were not altogether lacking in discrimination. We hear of one occasion when the Donatist veneration of dead circumcellions as martyrs was officially disallowed and their relics, which had been honoured with burial in church, were duly disinterred (Optatus 3.4.). It seems likely that among Donatists as a whole some at least were critical of the popular practice of according martyr-status, somewhat indiscriminately, to those who had sacrificed their lives, in one way or another, in the cause of religion. The widespread debate in the early church on the question of who truly merited martyr-status did not leave the Donatists untouched. When taken to task for the 'voluntary deaths' of circumcellion martyrs Cresconius could apparently point to conciliar decisions of his own party condemning such suicidal fanaticism (*Cresc.* 3.49.54). That circumcellion atrocities were regularly laid at the door of Donatist bishops suggests a close bond existed between Donatists and circumcellions (*Cresc.* 3.43.47). If the bishops, for their part, protested they could not be held responsible, since as churchmen they had no means of controlling such conduct, the case of Optatus of Timgad, previously mentioned, shows how effectively they could advance their cause by means of circumcellion terrorism. One final and important clue to the identity and motivation of the circumcellions is the fact, reported by Augustine, that their efforts were directed as much against paganism as against African Catholicism, which was of course perceived by them as a deviant form of Christianity. At the cost of their own lives they would attempt to disrupt pagan worship and destroy the sacred objects of the cult as idolatrous (*Ep.* 185.12; *Gaud.* 1.28.32; 1.38.51). It may, then, be concluded that the circumcellion phenomenon makes better sense when viewed against the background of a much more general

'militant tendency' in early Christianity (Chadwick 1985: 9–27). Such anti-pagan and anti-heretical activity on the part of religious zealots was by no means peculiar to the Donatist sect.

DONATISM AND THE AFRICAN THEOLOGICAL TRADITION

There is, of course, no need to deny the importance of the various influences discussed above in order to do adequate justice to the religious aspect of the dispute, to which the ancient sources themselves give prominence. The initial causes of the schism – personal rivalry and ecclesiastical ambition – and the contributory factors which later made themselves felt – a sense, however ill-defined, of African regional identity, political opportunism, the exploitation of economic grievances – warn against oversimplification. The schism cannot be explained in too narrowly religious terms. Nevertheless, it seems likely that the persistence of Donatism owes much to theology.

The Donatists of course were not strictly heretics. The Catholic Optatus clearly distinguished them from those heretics whose deficiencies in Trinitarian or Christological doctrine the church had condemned. Thus he deliberately labels them schismatics, since, though separated from the official church, they shared the same creed and observed identical sacraments, which Optatus was prepared to accept (Donatists coming over to the Catholic church did not require rebaptism: Optatus 1.10). Augustine too conceded that, apart perhaps from some ambiguous language suggestive of Arianism, the Donatists essentially agreed in doctrine with the rest of the church. Wishing however to put an effective end to the schism by bringing the Donatists within range of the anti-heresy laws, he was content to have them officially stigmatized as heretics through their practice of rebaptizing African Catholics who transferred to their side (*Ep.* 185.1; *De haeresibus* 69; *Cod. Theod.* 16.6.4). For Augustine, persistent schism amounted to heresy (*Cresc.* 2.7.9). Not surprisingly, these were charges which the Donatists rejected and of which they urged their opponents to provide proof (*Petil.* 2.95.218; *Gesta conlationis Carthaginensis* 3.193). Yet the Donatists too castigated their rivals as both schismatics and heretics (*Petil.* 2.38.91). In short, each side described the other in similarly dismissive terms, which of course reflected the fact that each side shared a common view of the church as one. They agreed that there could be only one church, clearly identifiable as a social entity in terms of its hierarchical structure and of its carefully regulated membership. The issue, then, was precisely the nature of that church. Thus, a comment from Augustine reveals how this crucial question was eventually reached at the Conference of Carthage, after much preliminary posturing: 'If only our brethren on the opposite side had brought forward this letter (introducing the doctrinal question) before all those delaying speeches of theirs, so that we might have got down to the debate on the church, on which the case turns' (ut iam de ecclesia, unde causa uertitur, aliquid ageremus: *Gesta conl. Carthag.* 3.261).

Alternative views of the church

William Frend pertinently identified the underlying issue dividing the two sides as two different ways of seeing the church in relation to the world, a point further

developed by Peter Brown (Frend [1952] 1972: 324; Brown 1969: 214). The Donatists, Brown writes, thought of themselves as a group trying to preserve an alternative to the society around them. 'They felt their identity to be constantly threatened: first by persecution, later, by compromise. Innocence, ritual purity, meritorious suffering, predominate in their image of themselves.' With this he contrasts Augustine's Catholicism, reflecting the attitude of a group 'confident of its powers to absorb the world without losing its identity'. From this point of view it would be true to say that Donatism, as an example of puritan separatism, was, as Robert Markus put it, 'the local expression of a permanent religious option'. Markus, however, adds the cautionary remark that expressing this contrast too starkly fails to take sufficiently into account 'the possible variety of ways in which a religious group might conceive its place in society' (Markus 1972: 21, 27). Markus is himself concerned to emphasize how much common ground existed between Augustine and the Donatists, how extensively both drew on a common African theological tradition reaching back to Tertullian and Cyprian. Markus thus rejects the view of Augustine as 'the theorist of the Constantinian revolution', who simply, as it were, endorsed the baptism of the Roman empire by insisting that Augustine retained an element of healthy scepticism towards the idea of a Christian state, a scepticism he shared with his Donatist contemporaries (Markus 1970: 114; cf. Brown 1961: 99). As for Donatism itself, Markus maintains that in its understanding 'of what kind of community the church was, of what was decisive for its identity in the world . . . it was representative in the fourth century of an older African theological tradition with deep roots in its characteristic religious mentality' (Markus 1972: 28).

Donatist theology: the official line

These observations gain precision from what evidence survives of Donatist theology. Here, for the most part, we have to rely on what can often only be a partial and tentative reconstruction of the Donatist position from the writings of Catholic authors whose purpose was refutation. Thus, of Donatus' theology we remain almost entirely ignorant. According to Jerome he left many writings pertaining to the Donatist heresy and also a treatise *On the Holy Spirit*. This is perhaps to be identified with his work *On the Trinity* mentioned by Augustine, since both writers criticize Donatus' Trinitarian language as subordinationist, in order, it seems, to smear the author with a suspicion of Arianism (Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus* 93; Augustine, *Haer.* 69). It is perhaps more likely that Donatus simply adhered to the Trinitarian formulae elaborated by Tertullian (Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean* 9; 16; 23; cf. Novatian, *De Trinitate* 27.12). A further work is mentioned by Augustine, a letter of Donatus he thought worthy of refutation (both letter and refutation are unfortunately lost). In this letter, however, Augustine all but admits that Donatus, in defending his party's exclusive claim to baptism, was indebted to Cyprian, while granting that Donatus did not invent the practice of rebaptism (*Retractationes* 1.2.1 and 3). This former bishop of Carthage (c. 248–58) was acknowledged as the African church's most eminent leader, the authority of whose teaching, preserved in a number of treatises and an extensive correspondence, had been sealed by martyrdom.

It is likely perhaps that Donatus, to whose liberal education and biblical expertise

Augustine pays tribute and whose importance in consolidating the opposition to Caecilian he acknowledges, had already enunciated a doctrine of baptism and of the church somewhat similar to that later propounded by Parmenian (363–93), his successor in the see of Carthage (*Sermo* 37.3.3; *Enarr.* 124.5). For our knowledge of Parmenian's views we are largely dependent on Optatus, his Catholic contemporary, bishop of Mileu in Numidia, who wrote a detailed refutation (traditionally referred to as 'Against Parmenian the Donatist'). It remains a difficult task to try and disentangle Parmenian's argument from Optatus' reply. It appears, however, that Parmenian treated baptism, the church, and the problem of sinners within it, this last only after giving due weight to the pertinent charges of apostasy and persecution made by the Donatists against their African opponents (Optatus, 1, 6.). In fact Optatus found much of which he could approve in his antagonist's portrayal of baptism; for example, his use of traditional images, such as the Flood (cf. 1 Pet. 3:19–21) and Circumcision (cf. Col. 2:11–12; Rom. 4:11). These images had already been employed by Tertullian and Cyprian. Optatus' main criticism is that, in rebaptizing African Catholics, the Donatists wrongly made baptism depend on the personal worth of the priest and so repeated what these images depict as a once-only sacrament (Optatus 1, 5). This provides a striking instance of the way both writers, Catholic and Donatist, shared a common African theological and exegetical tradition, yet it reveals important differences between them. It is worth noting that, on the whole, it is Parmenian who emerges as the conservator of the Cyprianic tradition, Optatus, by contrast, as the innovator. And this no doubt does much to account for the strength of Donatism. In rejecting the sacraments of unworthy priests Parmenian followed Cyprian. Again, in defending the practice of rebaptism by adducing the example of those who first received the baptism of John the Baptist, then, afterwards, baptism in the name of Christ (cf. Acts 19:1–7), Parmenian followed Cyprian (Cyprian, *Epp.* 65.2; 73.24–5). Parmenian further developed Cyprian's teaching based on the imagery of the Song of Songs, by insisting that the church to which Christ is betrothed is one (S. of S. 6:8), so that she alone has rightful possession of his gifts. She may thus be compared to 'a garden enclosed' and to 'a fountain sealed', from which heretics (among whom Parmenian included his African opponents) are excluded (Optatus 2.10; cf. S. of S. 4:12). They possess neither the 'keys' of episcopal authority to unlock the garden nor the 'seal' of baptism, the credal confession, which confers the right to drink from the fountain. Parmenian enumerated six gifts, which may perhaps be identified as follows: episcopal authority (Cyprian had stressed the importance of one bishop in each see following his predecessor in orderly succession, but to Parmenian any such authority claimed by his opponents was invalidated by their toleration of apostate priests: their episcopal 'seat' (*cathedra*) was the 'seat of pestilence' (cf. Ps. 1:1); the 'angel' of baptism (cf. John 5:4 [longer version]); the divine agency by which water was sanctified for the cleansing of sins; the 'Spirit of God' or Holy Spirit conferred in baptism, which could only be given by a priest who had received it himself (and not lost it through apostasy); the 'fountain sealed' (S. of S. 4:12), the life-giving water, the salvific properties of baptism; the 'seal' of faith or creed confessed in the baptismal ceremony, an essential precondition of benefits received; and finally, the altar, symbolized by the navel of the bride in the Song of Songs (7:2) and representing, perhaps, as

the place from which it was dispensed, the Eucharistic rite to which the baptized were admitted (Optatus, 2.2; 2.5–7). In all of this Parmenian can be seen to be elaborating a series of images already used by Tertullian and especially Cyprian. If some of the details of his exposition remain obscure, his intention was to claim for his own party the essential features of the church's endowment by Christ on the ground of superior sanctity. This point is given emphasis by his interpretation of biblical texts, already expounded by Cyprian, concerning the 'oil' (Ps. 140:5) and the 'sacrifice' (Isa. 66:3) of a sinner, to show that unworthy priests (those implicated in apostasy and persecution) could not be tolerated in the church without compromising its holiness (Optatus, 4.1).

We can follow this line of Donatist theological interpretation as the debate between the two sides intensified up to and after the decisive confrontation at the Conference of Carthage of 411. For the most part, it was a matter of consolidating existing positions with additional scriptural texts, but the central issues of the controversy also gradually came to be more sharply defined. For our information we depend mainly on Augustine's refutations of various Donatist writers of his time, such as Cresconius, Gaudentius, Emeritus, and Petilian, the last however especially, since his open pastoral letter of about the year 400 was quoted in full by Augustine in the course of countering it.

In Petilian's pastoral letter the nature of baptism and the church are, once again, discussed, but, once again the twin charges of apostasy and persecution, brought by the Donatists against their opponents, are reiterated throughout. He maintains that priests who are unworthy in this precise sense, when administering baptism, confer their own unworthiness, far less any benefit, on those who receive this sacrament. That was the crux of the matter between the opposing parties. For Petilian the sacrament depends on the holiness of the priest, so that knowingly to receive baptism from a sinful priest involves one in guilt, because so to receive it is to condone the sin and therefore to become implicated (*Petil.* 2.3.6; 2.4.8; 3.22.26). Augustine, for his part, insisted it was possible to receive a sacrament from a known sinner without necessarily consenting to his sin, in which case it did one no harm. But although with reference to sins in general Augustine's response might have seemed reasonable, his opponents did not find it very convincing. It is when the particular sins in question are borne in mind, that is, apostasy issuing in persecution, that the Donatist contention can be seen to have force. Augustine retorts that they focus too narrowly on certain sins to the neglect of others. But for Cresconius too the distinction between sins of such extreme seriousness and others was crucial (*Cresc.* 2.22.27). Some commentators have preferred to speak of ecclesial rather than personal holiness being important to the Donatists, referring in particular to a remark of Cresconius. Discussing Petilian's statement quoted above, Augustine asks what happens in baptism in the case of a sinful priest whose sin is not known. Cresconius replies that the presumption of innocence depends on his being in that church whose essential holiness the Donatists uphold. If sufficiently serious sin were exposed, such a priest would, according to the Donatist contention, be condemned and expelled (*Cresc.* 2.18.22). This observation underlines the principle on which the Donatists so strongly insist, that theirs was a church which had kept itself holy, free of those sins of apostasy and persecution which seemed to be the very contradiction of Christian-

ity itself. As Petilian challenged his opponents: 'What kind of faith do you have, which does not have charity? . . . Charity does not persecute' (*Petil.* 2.77.171).

Petilian also had a hand in drafting the communal Donatist letter presented as a formal reply to the Catholic case at the Carthage Conference in 411. Fortunately, this is preserved intact among the Conference records (*Gesta conlationis Carthaginensis* 3.258). To the Catholic evocation of a universal and morally mixed church awaiting God's judgement before finally achieving its promised holiness, the Donatists opposed their own conception of the church's holiness presently maintained by a priesthood whose ministry remained unimpaired by the guilt of serious sin. It was not, it seems, that the Donatists rejected the idea of a universal church, although it is true that Optatus and Augustine made the most of the fact that it was their party which was in formal communion through Rome with the rest of the world, while the Donatists were, to all intents and purposes, limited to Africa. Several times during the debate the Donatists challenged their opponents' claim to Catholicity, insisting that whichever party won the argument should be accorded that title (*Gesta conl. Carthag.* 3.146). It is to the church's holiness that they here appealed because their case rested precisely on their claim to maintain that. They therefore introduced themselves, in contrast to their opponents, as 'we who uphold the church's purity' (*nos qui defendimus ecclesiae puritatem: Gesta conl. Carthag.* 3.258). Its holiness, they argued, is foretold in scripture, in Messianic prophecies about a holy city or way, which find their fulfilment in Christ's saving work, the sanctification of the church mediated through baptism (Eph. 5:25–7). They then took up the challenge to reply to their opponents' argument that known offenders (including bishops compromised by apostasy and persecution) may be tolerated in the church for the sake of unity. This argument was based squarely on the four parables of the field (Matt. 13:24–30; 36–43), threshing-floor (Matt. 3:12), sheep and goats (Matt. 25:32–46) and net (Matt. 13:47–50), all of which seemed to sanction the co-existence in the church of saints and sinners, further support for this interpretation being drawn from the examples of the prophets, Christ himself, and the apostles. The Donatists respond that their opponents' argument gains no support from the parables quoted because either, as in the case of the field, it is the world, not the church, that is referred to, or, as in the case of the net, it is purely a question of sinners whose presence in the church escapes detection by the priests: the bad fish remain unknown to the fishermen till the final separation (Matt. 13:48). The Catholic identification of the field with the church, although in this case following Cyprian, is smartly trumped by the Lord's own interpretation clearly identifying the field as the world (Matt. 13:38). Next come the scriptural examples from which the Catholic side had sought corroboration for their interpretation of the parables, beginning with the prophets, whom they understood as not discriminating in any but a moral sense between themselves and those whose sins they denounced. The Donatists refute this with a formidable array of texts to show that the prophets indeed lived among those whose sins they so harshly condemned, but could not, without being false to their own words, have shared in their religious observances. The apostles too are shown to have expelled sinners from their midst, and even Christ's own toleration of Judas, the archetypal apostate (*traditor*), is neatly turned back against the Catholic side when it is pointed out that Judas remained an

unknown sinner as far as the other apostles were concerned: when exposed, he was immediately expelled. The Lord's toleration of Judas does not therefore open the apostolic ministry to apostates.

The Carthage Conference was a defining moment in the Donatist controversy, to which the protagonists on either side afterwards looked back, as Augustine's later anti-Donatist works demonstrate. The Donatists were in no doubt that, although the official verdict at the end of the Conference, which simply reiterated the earlier legal outcome of Constantine's tribunal, went against them, they had nevertheless been defeated not by argument but by force (*gesta indicant si uictus sum aut vici, si ueritate uictus sum aut potestate oppressus sum*: Emeritus in Augustine, *Gesta cum Emerito* 3). The verdict was swiftly followed up by measures of coercion which eventually, it seems, had their desired effect.

Theological diversity within Donatism

But there is another dimension to Donatist theology which was in some ways more influential than the official party line. This is represented by Parmenian's contemporary, the Donatist exegete Tyconius. The latter was criticized by Parmenian, as party-leader, in a letter later refuted by Augustine, for deviating from the Donatist position. In fact his theological stance is known mainly because his technical manual on biblical interpretation, the so-called *Book of Rules*, survives almost intact (edited by Burkitt 1894). Strangely enough, this has come about because of Augustine's own recommendation, in *De doctrina Christiana* 3.30.42–3.37.56, where the Rules of Tyconius are summarized and evaluated (for discussion of the Rules, see Bright 1988). Despite his Donatism, there was much in Tyconius' writing that Augustine could admire. Unfortunately, his other works, which included a commentary on the book of Revelation, much of it recycled by later Catholic commentators, have not been preserved (Gennadius, *De viris illustribus* 18). Augustine of course was eager to exploit the differences between Tyconius and Parmenian in developing his own arguments against the Donatist schism (*Contra epistolam Parmeniani* 1.1). So we have to take account of this in trying to assess Tyconius' own theological position. When, for example, Augustine contends that Tyconius made two key concessions to the Catholic case – namely, that the church is universal in extent and morally mixed in composition – it is not necessarily true that Tyconius accepted the Catholic position on those points, as expressed by Optatus and Augustine. What seems to have happened is that Augustine took over some central Tyconian themes and made them very much his own, subtly and skilfully adapting them where necessary to his own polemical purpose.

From the *Book of Rules*, although this is designed as a textbook on exegesis, not a theological treatise, we can at least gain some impression of Tyconius' doctrine of the church. Here his discussion has, as its central theme throughout the work, the Pauline idea of the church as the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12–26; Eph. 4:16). As already noted, despite their limitation as a sect to Africa, the Donatists did not dispute the fact of the church's universal expansion: Cresconius, for example, comments with approval on the gradual conversion then in progress of the entire world from idolatry to Christ (*Cresc.* 4.61.74). Tyconius also stresses the physical fact of the



Figure 37.1 The eagle gives to the seven angels the vials of the wrath of God (Rev. 16), from a twelfth-century Spanish manuscript of Beatus' *Commentary on Revelation*, which owes much to Tyconius. British Museum MS. Add. 11695, fol. 172r, with the permission of the British Library.

church's presence throughout the world, like the stone in the book of Daniel (Dan. 2:35) which grows into a great mountain and fills the whole world. The stone, he explains, is Christ the head, the mountain his body, the church (Tyconius, *Liber Regularum* (Burkitt 1894: 2–3)). But Tyconius' understanding of the church is also closely bound up with the idea that through scripture the people of God are addressed collectively 'as a body'. Words of praise and blame alike are spoken to the one people of God, sometimes words so sharply critical as to appear incompatible with the words of praise. The problem of inconsistency is solved if we accept that those words are directed at one body made up of two different parts (*duo autem corpora mixta sunt uelut unum, et in commune unum corpus laudatur aut crepatur*: Burkitt 1894: 26). Such a view conveniently suited the contemporary state of the North African church where two rival parties claimed to be the church, each being, in its polemics against the other, accustomed to reserve biblical commendation for itself while directing the strongest biblical denunciations at the party in opposition. But for Tyconius the entire body of those addressed through the words of scripture is to be identified with the body of Christ, the church, made up of two parts, the praised and the blamed, the good and the bad, saints and sinners. The novelty of his approach is precisely that, in his view, you belonged to this body, the church, whether you were a Catholic or a Donatist. Clearly, then, Tyconius' conception of the church differs from the traditional identification of it with a given social entity, defined in terms of hierarchy and membership, the identification made by Cyprian, by the Catholic Optatus and by the Donatist Parmenian. Augustine for his part, of course, developed a more complex doctrine of the church in which he tried to reconcile the Cyprianic view with the Tyconian. But the Tyconian view is worth noticing for its own sake.

If, then, for Tyconius, the body of Christ is the physical presence of the church in the world, one people addressed 'as a body', it is necessary to distinguish in principle, even if it is not always possible in practice, between true members of that body and false, between those who belong to it, as Tyconius puts it, only in a 'physical' or 'nominal' sense and those who are united to Christ in 'heart' and 'will'. True Christians are those whose membership of the body of Christ is accompanied by a willing obedience. But how is willing obedience to be defined? Tyconius turns to the question of faith and works which occupies so central a place in Pauline theology. He insists that throughout the Bible the terms of God's relationship with his people remain constant: 'for the same Spirit, the same faith, the same grace through Christ has always been given' (Burkitt 1894: 18–19). 'Let him who glories glory in the Lord' (1 Cor. 1:31), for we have nothing we have not received (cf. 1 Cor. 4:7). The true Christian, he says, is one who is justified 'by grace alone through faith' (*sola gratia per fidem*: Burkitt 1894: 15; cf. Eph. 2:8.). Our entire work is faith, though faith expresses itself in good works, which God may be said to perform through us by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Augustine, who later insisted that faith itself is God's gift, not something we can take credit for ourselves, felt that in saying our entire work is faith Tyconius had not gone far enough (Burkitt 1894: 19; cf. *De doct. Chr.* 3.33.46). Yet in expressing it even more uncompromisingly, Augustine was surely merely following through Tyconius' intention. Thus, for Tyconius, there is a sense in which the stipulations of the Law found in scripture no longer apply to Christians

who do not depend on the Law for justification and whose attitude to God is such as to lead to a willing fulfilment of the same moral duties as the Law requires. Indeed we fall short of perfection, but what counts is our intention and effort, and, if there is always something left for God to forgive, that is to enable us to acknowledge our ultimate dependence on his mercy. And this is true even of the greatest saints and martyrs, as the mother of seven martyred sons confesses in the second book of Maccabees (Burkitt 1894: 20–1; cf. 2 Macc. 7:29). It would probably not be wrong to see Tyconius here as the apologist of Donatism, responding to Catholic criticism that the Donatists as a church of self-styled saints and martyrs prided themselves unduly on their own righteousness.

God promised Abraham ‘all nations’, a promise fulfilled in the church, but not by the mere physical expansion of the church throughout the world. Rather, the promise applies to Abraham’s spiritual descendants, those in the church who are justified by faith, not to Abraham’s carnal descendants, those in the church who may still be regarded as the offspring of the Law. For the Law has not been totally replaced by grace, just as grace was not entirely absent when the Law was in full vigour under the old dispensation. So there is, for Tyconius, a sense in which the Law still operates in the church, where Christianity becomes an arid legalism, especially among those whose outward conformity to the Law of God is hypocritically at variance with their persecution of the saints (*quid persequitur Verbum in carne? . . . aliud maius est euidentiis signum agnoscendi antichristi non esse dixit, quam qui negat Christum in carne, id est odit fratrem*: Burkitt 1894: 68; cf. 1 John 4:1–3).

Tyconius tries to make sense of this state of affairs in the perspective of the final divine judgement. Most Christian writers in the West, in line with Jewish apocalyptic thinking, expected the Messiah to come in power at the end of the age, at the final day of reckoning, which had at first been thought imminent but was now generally considered to have been mercifully delayed. Christ had not only come, but would come again a second time to lay manifest claim to the spiritual victory his earthly ministry had achieved over Satan and the powers of darkness. Tyconius reinterprets the idea of a ‘second coming’ to give it a twofold sense: it may be understood not only of the final coming in glory of Christ the head, but also of his body, the church, in the rebirth and suffering of whose members Christ may be said to ‘come again’ now. The same is true of the coming of Antichrist. All who oppose Christ also form a body, with the Devil at their head. They will be fully exposed and defeated only at the end, but their presence now within the church is clearly revealed by the fact of persecution carried out in the Christian name. The church itself therefore is the place where the epic struggle between Christ and the Devil is now carried on through their respective followers and will eventually reach its final outcome. Since this is essentially a moral struggle, however, it is one which brings condemnation and defeat upon the persecutor, but to the victim of persecution a victory continuous with that of Christ himself. Indeed, it is in this sense that Tyconius reinterprets the promised millennium, the reign of Christ and his saints here on earth for a thousand years. The thousand years are taken as symbolic of the present age, of Christ’s reign with his saints here and now. In so far as through the saintly members of the church the power and wiles of the Devil are being overcome now, Christ may be said to reign victorious. Christ comes now in

glory unseen, but in the end his coming will be revealed in full splendour (Burkitt 1894: 4).

Fundamentally, Tyconius rests his case on a straightforward moral judgement. To him, as to his fellow Donatists, it was a self-evident absurdity that persecutors of Christians could be true Christians themselves. His doctrine of the church appears to



Figure 37.2 Augustine at work, and his two cities, from J. Amerbach's 1489 Basle edition of Augustine's *De civitate Dei*. With the permission of the University of St Andrews Library.

reflect the historical fact that the Donatists found themselves up against a Catholic party officially recognized and supported by the state and prepared to encourage or connive at the use of force in order to establish and maintain that privileged position. Persecutors had commonly been consigned to the Devil. If, like tares, they were now to be found, sown by the Devil, in the field of the church, their membership of the body of Christ was no more than nominal, for, in Tyconius' view, it is by their conduct, not merely their confession, that Christians express their true allegiance, either to Christ or to the Devil. Tertullian had already seen persecution as a foretaste of final judgement. For Tyconius, what was happening in Africa between persecuted Donatists and persecuting Catholics was but a present anticipation of the final definitive separation between good and bad which, according to the book of Revelation, would take place amid persecution on an unprecedented scale and on a global dimension.²

Tyconius' large-scale vision and subtle sophistication are equally impressive. It is ironic that his teaching should have been so eagerly listened to by Augustine, yet rejected by the leading spokesmen of his own sect. Parmenian and subsequent Donatist leaders no doubt realized how destructive it could be of a position which depended so much for authentication on the theology of Cyprian. But it was hardly Tyconius' intention to undermine the Donatist case. Tyconius could, as occasion demanded, write sharply in defence of his party, as later Catholic commentators on Revelation, such as Primasius and Bede, freely acknowledged in recording their debt to him.³ Yet as a theologian and exegete Tyconius may be said to have raised the level of the Catholic–Donatist debate on to a higher plane. His view of the church's universality, as of its incorporation of saints and sinners, in so far as this was put forward as an account of the church's true nature revealed in scripture, may perhaps be seen as an attempt to transcend the sectarian divide in fourth-century Africa. He may even have felt that to do so could help pave the way for a meeting of minds (Chadwick 1989: 54). However, it was left to Augustine to realize the full potential of Tyconius' teaching, as part of his effort to reconcile the Donatists, which included his own, distinctive reformulation of the doctrine of the church.

Why, then, to return to the question with which this discussion began, did Donatism last so long? It may perhaps be concluded that the local conditions of Roman Africa contributed in no small measure to the protracted duration and bitterness of the controversy, but that the persistence of the schism was mainly due, despite some diversity within Donatist theology, to the success with which the Donatists appropriated Cyprian and to the consistency with which they adhered to a clear-cut position. In short, they were able to present themselves convincingly to the majority of their fellow-Africans as the true heirs of the Christian tradition.

NOTES

- ¹ *Circumcelliones agonisticos nuncupans*, Optatus 3.4 (speaking of Parmenian); cf. *bonum agonem certavi*, 2 Tim. 4:7; Tertullian, *Ad Martyras* 4.2; Cyprian, *Ep.* 10.4; Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 132.6.
- ² *quod autem in Danihel dixit, in Africa geritur* (Burkitt 1894: 67; cf. Matt. 24:15–16;

Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* 4). Bede's commentary on Revelation uses that of Tyconius, 'apart from those places where he attempted to defend the schism of his own party, the Donatists, and deplored the persecution which they suffered . . . speaking of it as martyrdom and glorying in the fact that this had been foretold in the book of Revelation' (*Explanatio Apocalypsis*, PL 93.132–3).

- 3 Tyconius 'made biting mockery of our church', says Primasius (*Commentarius in Apocalypsin*, Prologus, CChr.SL 92.1); for Bede, see previous note.

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ARIANISM



David Rankin

CONTEMPORARY INTEREST IN ARIANISM

The charge of espousing ‘Arian’ views remains a potent and potentially damaging one even in modern times: 1977 saw the publication of the highly controversial *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Hick 1977). Perhaps nothing in the last few decades has generated so much heated theological debate. Within months a counter publication, *The Truth of God Incarnate* (Green 1977), appeared, as did a number of highly critical and influential reviews of *The Myth*. While few of the scholars who responded critically to *The Myth* explicitly accused any of its contributors of ‘Arianism’ (or of any named heresy), the implication was often clear (Torrance 1981: 132; Heron 1981: 75). John Macquarrie, for example, reflects this – though he is himself more cautious – when he writes that while ‘it would be an anachronism to describe the positions [of the contributors to *The Myth*] as Arian, deist or Unitarian, . . . unquestionably there are affinities, and it is hardly likely that an updated Christianity without incarnation will prove any more successful than these dead ends of the past’ (in Green 1977: 144). From the late 1970s until the present day the same accusations have also been directed at proponents of some forms of New Age thought present within a number of mainstream Christian churches, as well as at aspects of feminist theological teaching (Toon 1991: 296). The supposed connection between particular expressions of these and the ancient heresy of Arianism is rarely made explicit yet is often implied. ‘Arianism’, whatever that term might mean in any given context, is apparently ever with us!

ARIUS AND THE EARLY ARIANS

History: the early period (318–37)

The precise order of events surrounding the outbreak of the so-called Arian controversy has been the subject of intense debate for as long as scholars have studied the period. The prevailing consensus would have it that at some time around 320 CE Arius (256–336 CE), a presbyter in Alexandria although a native of Libya, took

exception to the teachings of his bishop Alexander concerning the relationship of the Son to the Father. This Arius tradition posits both a Libyan connection (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 69.1) and an association with the Meletian schism of the 310s, although Rowan Williams (1987) has convincingly demonstrated that the latter is impossible given that Athanasius would not have failed to mention it had it been true.

In a letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia (Opitz 1934–5: Urkunde [Document] 1), Arius also refers to himself and Eusebius (died 341/2) as ‘fellow-Lucianists’ and this has led, not unreasonably, to speculation that Arius was a pupil of Lucian of Antioch (c. 240–312). This is, however, now largely discounted and it is assumed that Arius was merely seeking to identify himself, and thereby to establish some sort of alliance with a particular group of powerful ecclesiastical figures. If we accept the ordering of events suggested by Williams (and there seems every reason to do so) – in particular the ordering of the Arian documents of the period (see pp. 979–80) – then in 321 (Opitz suggests 320) Arius wrote to his bishop (Urkunde 6) outlining a distinctly monotheistic position. This he claims clearly to have learned from both tradition and the bishop himself. The Son is described as a distinct hypostasis (as is also the Spirit) but also as the creature (though perfect) and offspring of God (the Father) created before time but implicitly not from eternity; as not *homoousios* (‘of the same being’) with the Father; as not co-eternal with Him; and as not (that is, not having existence) before his generation. For Arius (according to this letter), ‘begotten’ must mean ‘created’.

Alexander now took formal action against Arius (and some of the latter’s associ-



Figure 38.1 Late Roman mosaic representation of Alexandria from Jerash in Jordan. Photo J. C. N. Coulston.

ates) who, within a short time of the letter above, felt constrained to write to Eusebius, bishop of the imperial capital Nicomedia, complaining about his treatment at the hands of Alexander (Urkunde 1: Williams [1987] dates this as 321/2, Opitz as 324). Not a great deal is known about the particular theology of this Eusebius. His own letter to Paulinus of Tyre (Urkunde 8; c. 320/1?) suggests that it included the incomparability of God and the impossibility of God communicating his own essence. He nowhere appears to describe the Son as derived from the non-existent. Alexander had, so Arius claims, 'driven us out of the city as atheists' and publicly preached that the Son was eternally existent, was unbegotten along with the Father (no Arian ever distinguished between 'agenetos' and 'agennetos'), and had his existence from the Father (God) himself. Arius then outlines his own position: that the Son is not unbegotten but only-begotten, that he has subsisted from before time (but implicitly not from eternity), that he had a beginning and was created from the non-existent (ex *oun* *onton*).

Alexander, by way of an encyclical letter (Urkunde 4b), then notified the wider church that the bishops of Egypt and Libya, meeting in synod, had anathematized Arius for his alleged heresy (Williams 1987 gives 325, while Opitz 1934–5 gives 319; that is, the latter places it before Arius' letter to Alexander, which is no longer tenable given the almost irenic tone of that epistle). In this encyclical, which should precede the Council summoned to Nicaea by a few months and was probably intended to influence events there, Alexander spells out the 'Arian' heresy in much the same way as posterity has come to characterize it. Arius teaches that there was a time when God was not a Father, that his Word was not from eternity, that this Word was made out of nothing (the non-existent), that there was [sc. a time] when he was not, that the Son is a creature and a work, that the Son is not the Father's true Word or Wisdom, that the Son/Word is mutable and that the Son knows accurately neither the Father nor even the nature of his own essence.

Eusebius of Caesarea

After his excommunication Arius fled to Nicomedia. He was not without friends and around this time, at a synod held in Caesarea of Palestine, Arius' teachings were declared orthodox. The bishop of Palestinian Caesarea, the famous church historian Eusebius Pamphili (c. 263–337 [or 340]), himself wrote to Alexander pleading Arius' cause. This Eusebius was a pupil of Origen – Young refers to him as a representative of 'popular Origenism' (1983: 1) – and he is identified commonly (and probably unhelpfully, as we shall see later) as semi-Arian. Kelly says that he was 'not really an Arian at heart' (1977: 231) and Young an 'amateur' theologian and philosopher (1983: 17). He did not, maintains Young, actually understand or appreciate many of the dilemmas present in the controversy in which he became so closely involved, he was confused in many of his responses, and his theology was ultimately marked by 'sheer mediocrity and conservatism' (1983: 23). Like Arius, much of Eusebius' theological reflection was as much reactive as proactive. He was deeply involved in the action taken after Nicaea against Eustathius of Antioch and Marcellus of Ancyra against whom Eusebius directed much of his polemical effort. His *De ecclesiastica theologia*, three books written in 337 primarily against Marcellus

(he had already written his *Contra Marcellum* the year before), was characterized in part by what Quasten calls an 'advanced subordinationism' (1983: 342) and Kelly 'Origen in his most subordinationist mood' (1977: 225). He could, with Origen (and Paulinus of Tyre), describe the Logos as a 'second God'. Subordinationism was for him the only way to guarantee an appropriate distinction of Persons. The Son is God, but not the one, true God. Eusebius was not, as later events would show, opposed absolutely to the concept of the '*homoousion*' describing the relationship between Father and Son as long as it was understood neither in a Sabellian sense, emphasizing the distinctiveness of the Son from the Father (which was his major concern with Marcellus), nor as implying a division in the substance of the Monad. In a letter written to his congregation after Nicaea, he explained his understanding of its application at Nicaea as declaring that the Son was like the Father and bore no resemblance to the creatures. Eusebius could not accept the notion that the Father had created the Son. The Logos was the first product (*gennema*) of all beings. For Eusebius, as a good Origenist, the Son (and the Holy Spirit) had his own distinct hypostasis. This hypostasis (though not that of the Spirit who was a creation of the Son) is divine, but subordinate to the Supreme God. The Son worships the Father as God; therefore, the Father is God of the Son (Hanson 1988b: 49). The Logos functioned also as the Father's intermediary for creating and governing the universe – Young calls Eusebius' Logos the Neoplatonic Word-Soul, the intermediary between God and creation (1983: 18) – and is God solely as the image of the true God though not in his own right (*De ecclesiastica theologia* 2.23). The Son's mediatorship is connected, however, *not* to the Incarnation but to his status within the Godhead (Hanson 1988b: 39). Unlike Origen, however, for Eusebius there is no eternal begetting. The begetting of the Son is not without beginning. The Son is not co-eternal with the Father (*Demonstratio evangelica* 5.1.20). The Father is alone unoriginated. For Eusebius, however, the Logos was not created 'out of the non-existent' (*De ecclesiastica theologia* 1.10) but is, somewhat vaguely, 'from the Father' (as are not all things surely?). In addition, there is no human soul in Eusebius' Christ (*De ecclesiastica theologia* 1.20.90) – for Eusebius is an early exponent of a Word-flesh Christology – nor is the Logos a mutable creature.

The Council of Nicaea in 325 and its aftermath

In early 325 a synod meeting at Antioch provisionally excommunicated Eusebius for failing to condemn Arius and set this decision for ratification at a subsequent council to be convened by the emperor at Ancyra in Galatia after Easter. Constantine then transferred this meeting to Nicaea near Nicomedia so that he could give it his personal attention. Over 200 eastern bishops attended. At Nicaea came the definitive repudiation of Arius (and the rehabilitation of Eusebius of Caesarea) and both the promulgation of the beginnings perhaps of the famous Creed and the formal declaration of the '*homoousion*'.

Almost immediately the tide began to turn against the radical Nicene/Homoousian 'party'. This was the result partly of the growing influence of Eusebius of Nicomedia (more radical in his support of Arius than his namesake) and, to a lesser extent, of Eusebius of Caesarea himself (who led those favouring recognition of

the Son's divinity in purely biblical terms), of the theological extremism of the hyper-Nicenes Eustathius of Antioch and Marcellus of Ancyra (a major target later of the Neo-Arians), and both the theological (although note the view that Athanasius did not become theologically involved until after 339) and, more significantly, the political activities of Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria from 328. Eustathius was deposed by a synod meeting in Antioch in 326, Athanasius by one in Tyre in 335 (but for political more than theological reasons) – Hanson argues that Athanasius took no part in the controversy until 341 (1988b: 272) – and Marcellus at Constantinople in 336. Arius himself had been recalled from exile (but not restored to communion everywhere) in 328. As the tide swung away from the Homoousian – even Athanasius himself apparently thought it impolitic to make any significant use of it until 360/1 – and towards first the Homoiousian and later the Homoian, Arius apparently felt vindicated, although there were no real attempts to rehabilitate him (events, though the controversy was destined to bear his name, had simply passed him by), and legend has it that the rather sad and forlorn figure died in a privy the evening before Constantine was to restore him (c. 336). Constantine himself died in 337.

ARIAN DOCUMENTS OF THE EARLY PERIOD

There are a number of extant documents which relate to the early period of the controversy, particularly to those events involving Arius himself. We have looked above at Arius' letter to his bishop preserved by both Athanasius and (thankfully) Epiphanius which Williams (1987) rightly dates to 321 (Opitz 320); at Arius' letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia preserved by both Theodoret and Epiphanius which Williams dates to 321/2 (Opitz 318); and at the encyclical letter of Alexander announcing Arius' anathematization preserved by the historian Socrates which Williams dates to 325 (Opitz 319). There is also Arius' confession of faith addressed to the emperor (Urkunde 30) preserved by both Socrates and Sozomen and dated to 327. In this confession Arius claims both to have been vindicated by recent events and to have held faithfully to the teaching of the church and, more importantly, of the Scriptures.

The actual letters of Arius are, of course, the most helpful when examining the thought of the alleged arch-heretic. Also of considerable value, though to be treated with great caution, are the extracts which Athanasius claims to have lifted from Arius' metrical piece, the so-called *Thalia*, and included in his *De Synodis* (15) and *Orationes contra Arianos* (1.5–6). Though useful, we must remember that these are quoted by Athanasius for polemical purposes and must be read against what we do know that Arius actually wrote. Although Kannengiesser (1983: 467) has argued strongly that the *De Synodis* 15 extracts – those called the *Blasphemies of Arius* by Athanasius – belong to the early 360s and were probably written by a later Arian theologian rather than by Arius himself, the present consensus appears to be that both sets of extracts, however refashioned or represented for polemical purposes by Athanasius or by his immediate source, originated with Arius himself (Williams 1987: 65–6). While differing in particular respects from the verifiable Arian works

— particularly Urkunde 1, Urkunde 6, and Urkunde 30 (the extracts express, for example, a more clearly defined Trinitarian (though heterodox) doctrine than do the letters) — they yet contain significant and telling similarities of language and thought.

What is an Arian?

“‘Arian’”, says Maurice Wiles, ‘as a designation for anyone other than the immediate associates of Arius himself who were excluded from the church of Egypt by Alexander, is a title given by Athanasius to his opponents for a specific polemical purpose of defamation by association’ (in Barnes and Williams 1993: 42). Elsewhere he speaks of Arians as ‘a loosely allied group of people with overlapping but by no means identical concerns, held together more by their opposition to certain Marcellan and Athanasian tendencies than by a single theological platform’ (in Williams 1989: 159). Here lie most of the problems associated with identifying and categorizing Arianism in the fourth century.

Williams (1987: 2–25) gives a more than adequate summary of the history of Arian research and scholarship from the seventeenth century until the present day. Up to the 1830s Arianism was associated primarily with Neoplatonism (1987: 3). Newman, in his celebrated *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (1833), sought to explain Arianism ‘in terms of the distinctive theological and exegetical positions of the Antiochene church’. Like Newman, Harnack (*Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 4th edn, 1909) saw Aristotelian Rationalism as the obvious background to Arius’ system. Knowing only a notion of ‘an external obedience to God, in the Logos and in believers alike’, says Harnack, ‘Arianism provides merely a rationale for heroic asceticism (p. 7). For Gwatkin (*Studies of Arianism*, 1882 and 1900), Arianism was the result of irreverent philosophical speculation (p. 9).

One has to ask the question from the outset whether it is even possible to categorize or describe Arianism as such. Was there such a thing? If Arianism is that which was taught and preached by Arius, the Alexandrian presbyter, were there any other Arians? For we know so little about his teaching and beliefs (though much about what Athanasius alleged he believed and taught) and can see little evidence (indeed the opposite applies) that any contemporary or later group of persons saw themselves as his followers. And if there was a group after Arius’ time who could be described as Arian, can Arius himself then properly be called Arian? And with respect to those from later in the century — people like Aetius and Eunomius (the so-called neo-Arians) — who were characterized by their opponents as Arian, could Arius again be numbered among their legitimate forebears? Or, if there was a body of thought (even if only in the mind of Athanasius and others) which has come to be known as Arianism, was there anybody in the fourth century to whom such beliefs could accurately or reasonably be ascribed?

Frameworks for Arius’ theology

Arius’ monotheism, according to Pollard, was philosophical, not biblical, metaphysical and not ethical, and his God the Absolute of the philosophical schools

(1958: 103f.). This view of early Arianism was a commonplace until recent times but has now been soundly rejected by Wiles (1962: 339f.), Stead (1964: 19) and Gregg and Groh (1981: 87), among others. While Arius, according to Stead, 'placed more reliance on philosophical and dialectical techniques than either of his great critics' (1964: 16), some (like Pollard) have been too ready to assume, from Arius' use of the term *monas*, that he has transformed 'the living God of the Bible' into 'the Absolute of the philosophical schools' (1964: 19). Barnard, however, accepts quite readily the essentially philosophical basis of Arius' position. 'Arius' philosophical presuppositions determined the direction which his theological speculation took' (1970: 186). 'Arius drew on no "proto-Arian" tradition already evolving within the Church. His system was simply philosophical dualism' (1970: 187; cf. Stead 1964: 22). Yet, he concedes, 'for Arius *monas* is a theological rather than a philosophical title' and 'it is unlikely that [he] began from *monas* as the Absolute of the philosophical schools into which he fitted some Christian elements' (1972: 112). The differences between Arius and Athanasius, for example, 'do not lie primarily in their idea of God considered philosophically' (1972: 113). For Dragas, 'Arius [presents] a monistic doctrine of God, who exists in himself and must be existentially differentiated from all things which were made by him out of nothing' (1981: 26f.). 'Arius' starting point is theo-monistic' (1981: 28); what Arius presents is 'an ultimately deistic-philosophical theology against a theistic theology of Athanasius' (1981: 38). The Arian crisis, for Kannengiesser, was essentially one of hermeneutics (1982: 1) and the teachings of Arius of an essentially metaphysical order (1982: 17).

The Trinity

'Arianism was a Trinitarian doctrine which arose out of the difficulty of conceiving of an eternal generation in God in which the Son while remaining distinct from the Father will nevertheless remain equal with him' (Hanson 1988b: 84). Except for a brief mention of 'three hypostases' in the letter of Arius to Eusebius of Nicomedia, however, there is not, in any of the unquestioned writings of Arius himself, any explicitly defined Trinitarian doctrine. Nor does Alexander of Alexandria allude to any such on Arius' part in his encyclical. What we do have can be found in the *Thalia* excerpts given by Athanasius which demonstrate why Athanasius and his allies were for so long opposed to the trihypostatic language eventually adopted by orthodoxy. Arius' 'Trinity arises as the creation of distinct and subordinate beings by the original monad' (Stead 1964: 18). The Father (i.e. God), according to the letter to Alexander, is 'Monad and Beginning of all' (presumably including the Son and the Holy Spirit). The *Thalia*, according to *Contra Arianos*, declares that 'the essences of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are separate in nature and estranged and disconnected and alien and without participation of each other' (1.6), and according to *De Synodis* 15, the Son (and presumably the Spirit, too) came 'to be truly only at the Father's will' (38). According to Urkunde 6, the Father is 'one God, alone unbegotten, everlasting, unbegun, true, immortal, wise, good, sovereign, judge'. From the same letter we read that the Son is 'the perfect creature of God', although the Supreme One (the Father) could, according to a *Thalia* extract from *De synodis*, 'begat one equal to the Son but not greater or superior or more excellent' (28f.). The

Son's perfection is then not necessarily, but only historically unique. The notion of Arius that the Son-Logos was created for the purpose of creating the world is attested in Urkunde 6, in the *De Synodis*, and by Alexander. The *De synodis* extract of the *Thalia*, in terms similar to that from the *Contra Arianos*, 'presents Arius' view of the separate and unequal hypostases in the Trinity (Stead 1978: 26) as a 'Trinity of unequal powers' (ibid.: 30). While it is true that 'such a hierarchical Trinity would be perfectly intelligible to anyone familiar with the Origenist tradition' (ibid.), we are reminded, yet again, that the subordination of the Son (and of the Spirit) to the Father in the time before Nicaea was more the rule than the exception, in both East (Origen) and West (Tertullian), among orthodox and heterodox alike. Where Arius does seem to part company (if he ever enjoyed it!) with Origenism is in his emphasis on the separate and alien character of the three hypostases. For Arius, God, rather than the Father, precedes the Son in existence. God, for Arius, (that is, the only true God), only becomes, indeed can only become Father with the creation/begetting of the Son; at least, that is, Arius as represented by Alexander and the *Thalia* excerpts. According to Alexander, Arius declared that 'God was not always a Father' (Urkunde 4b) and Athanasius reports the *Thalia* as declaring that 'God was not always a Father'. This generation of the Son, for Arius, takes place at a point in time and is not – while clearly pre-existent (see Urkunde 1: 'the Son subsisted before time by the Father's will'; Urkunde 6: 'at the will of God [the Son] created before times and before ages'; Urkunde 30: '[the Son] begotten of God the Father before all ages') – from eternity (Urkunde 1: 'the Son had a beginning'; Urkunde 6: '[sc. the Son is] not eternal or co-eternal or co-originate with the Father'; Urkunde 4b: 'the Word [is] not from eternity').

The Logos-Son

The two Logoi/Wisdoms

'For Arius the Logos which is proper to God is an attribute to God and has no separate hypostatical existence of its own' (Pollard 1957: 284). 'Arius [denies] the identity of the Logos and the Son, by dehypostasising the Logos, by reducing the concept of eternal generation to premundane origination, by making the Son a creature, and by interpreting the concept of subordination in the sense of posteriority and inferiority of essence' (ibid.: 286). The evidence for these assertions, particularly for that of the implied notion of the two Logoi, the one an integral attribute of God and the other a separate, hypostasized creature identified with the Son, can be found both among the *Thalia* excerpts from the *Contra Arianos* – where the author speaks of two Wisdoms (= two Logoi): 'one an attribute co-existent with God; the other originated in God, and named as Wisdom and Word as partaking of it [sc. the attribute] . . . not the true power of God' (1.5) – and in Alexander's encyclical, where the Son is described as 'not by nature the Father's true Word or Wisdom' and as having come 'into being by God's own Word and Wisdom'. It is noteworthy that no such sentiments are to be found in any of the 'genuine' writings of Arius himself (Urkunde 1, 6 and 30).

Notwithstanding these reservations, however, whatever disagreements different

scholars might properly have with Pollard on other matters relating to Arius and to Arianism, few would today seriously disagree with these particular assessments. Yet, some still question them with respect to their implications for a relatively low status of the Son/created Logos, arguing rather that Arius exhibited a particularly high, even exalted, view of the status of the Son. The Son is described by Arius in Urkunde 1 as 'before ages as God full (*plêrês theos*) [of grace and truth]' and among the *Thalia* excerpts in the *De Synodis* as 'being a mighty God' hymning 'the Supreme [sc. God] in part' – though the latter does imply as an inferior form of deity. A *Thalia* excerpt from *Contra Arianos* suggests this particularly, declaring the Word to be 'not true (*alêthinos*) God', to be 'God only in name . . . by participation'. This does seem to imply two Wisdoms or two Logoi (Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* 1.6); that is, the first Logos/Wisdom (in patristic thought these were often interchangeable terms) as an attribute (from eternity) of God, and the second as the creature of God, pre-existent but not from eternity (see the *Thalia* excerpt from the *Contra Arianos* above). Yet, while it is safe to say that Arius may well have believed in the existence of the two Wisdoms/Logoi, he seems not actually to have expressed himself in such terms in his 'genuine' writings. Perhaps, however, we can trust the evidence of *Contra Arianos* (and possibly that of Alexander's encyclical letter) that Arius viewed only the Reason intrinsic to God as properly and 'truly' termed Word and Wisdom (Gregg and Groh 1981: 56) and speak of the Arian doctrine of God's intrinsic Word, and of the Son as merely named 'Word' (Gregg and Groh 1981: 111); that is, that it is only the Logos or Wisdom being the attribute of God which can properly be termed or regarded as 'God', and the other only as titled 'god' by grace and not by nature; that is, as not truly God (see the credal anti-Arian emphasis on the Son/Logos as 'truly/very God').

The nature of the created Logos: the Logos as creature

The Logos was not, for Arius, generated from the essence of God – this is evidenced both by Urkunde 1 ('the Son [was] not part of the unbegotten . . . nor part of God) and Urkunde 6 ('the Son was not a portion [of God]') and by a *Thalia* excerpt from the *Contra Arianos* – but was created 'ex ouk onton' (out of the non-existent). Given that Arius could apparently understand generation only in a material sense, the notion of God generating or creating the Son/Logos out of his own being was simply unacceptable, implying as it would a diminution of the divine majesty and a division of the divine essence. This is clear in Urkunde 6 where Arius denies the generation of the Son by a Sabellian-like division of the supreme Monad. Another major issue in any consideration of Arius' theology is his position on the mutability of the Son/Logos. For while it is of God's essence to be immutable, some would argue that the very creatureliness of the Son/Logos would render him, of necessity, mutable. The requirement of his active and voluntary obedience, it is claimed, would require it. Yet such claims of the mutability of Arius' Logos are supported only by Alexander's encyclical, where the Son is described as 'by nature mutable and susceptible to change', and by an excerpt from *Contra Arianos* which declares the Word to be 'by nature . . . alterable (as we are) and remains good by his free will': Urkunde 1 and Urkunde 6 – Arius' 'genuine' writings – on the other

hand, describe the Son as 'unchangeable' and 'unalterable and unchangeable' respectively.

Alexander describes Arius as depicting the Son as both a 'creature' (*ktisma*) and a 'work' (*poiēma*). In Urkunde 6 Arius himself describes the Son as a 'perfect creature' (*ktisma teleion*) of God, but with the qualifying 'but not as one of the creatures', and as 'an offspring' (*gennema*), but not as one of things that have come into existence'. Neither set of *Thalia* excerpts suggests that the Son was explicitly called by Arius a 'creature' or a 'work'. According to Gregg and Groh, however, 'what [the Arians] preach is a creature promoted to the status of a god' (1981: 1). The Arian mediator is not then, for them, an extension of the divine nature but a creation of the divine will (ibid.: 5) – this is evidenced for them by Urkunde 1, Urkunde 6 ('[the Son] subsists at God's will') and the *Thalia* excerpts from *De Synodis* – and the centrality of the Son's dependence on the divine will (ibid.: 7). Gregg and Groh even call this a 'Christology of the Divine Will' (ibid.: 161–91). Arius' God, maintain Gregg and Groh, requires a freely obedient rational creature who responds also by willing (ibid.: 14). To Arius, Jesus, as changeable (mutable), was thereby (morally) improvable along the lines of the Stoic notion of '*prokopē*' (advance) (ibid.: 19). Gregg and Groh speak of a promotional scheme on the part of Arius, of a Christ raised by God to the pinnacle of creaturely exaltation because of his obedient fidelity in a virtuous life (ibid.: 20). Indeed this promotional Christological understanding is fundamental to their reconstruction of Arian soteriology (ibid.: 21). They speak of 'a perfected creature whose nature remained [no matter how exalted] always creaturely and whose position was always subordinate to and dependent upon the Father's will' (ibid.: 24). For Arius the unity of Son with the Father is one of agreement (*sumphonia*) with God, one of harmony rather than of essence (ibid.: 26). Much of this is, again however, too dependent on the unreliable *Thalia* excerpts. Their claim that the Son/Logos is according to the *Thalia* indispensable for creaturely knowledge and reverence of the Father (ibid.: 81) is questionable even there, for the knowledge and vision of the Father on the part of the Son is limited to the Son's own capacity, as it is for us. Indeed, it is questionable to what extent the Arian Christ even knows himself. In both Urkunde 4b and the *Thalia* excerpts Arius is seen to maintain that the Son does not know even his own essence (*ousia*). Gregg and Groh assume this 'advancement' Christology as Arius' own. It is actually the evidence of Alexander or Athanasius which suggests this; we do not have any hard evidence that Arius himself used the language of participation by grace.

For Gregg and Groh the Arian Christ is 'a begraced creature . . . [though] more than others' (1981: 27), a servant like by nature who by grace can call God 'Father' (ibid.: 28). Christ is representative Son, but by no means the only possible Son (ibid.: 30). For this dimension one can observe the statement of the *Thalia* excerpts from *Contra Arianos* that 'the Supreme [God] could beget one equal to the Son but not greater or superior or more excellent'. Here the 'ethical and voluntarist cast of Arius' thought is crucial (ibid.: 57). Yet Gregg and Groh, to my mind, stake far too much on suspect evidence.

The soul of Christ

Arius, according to Wolfson, denied the existence of a rational soul in Jesus (1958: 27). Such an assertion has long been a commonplace in much (uninformed) Arian scholarship. According to Haugaard, while in Arius there is ‘an implicit assumption that the Word is the subject of all the actions and words of the Gospel, and that the Word-as-human-soul psychology is consistent with his views, it does not follow that he actually articulated such a psychology’ (1960: 256f.). Hanson, however, appears to adopt the earlier view, arguing that it can be plausibly argued that Arius strenuously and steadfastly denied that the Incarnate Word had any human soul at all (1987: 411). Lucian of Antioch, whom Hanson suggests may have been the teacher of Arius, taught the doctrine of the ‘*soma apsychon*’ (1988b: 26). Yet, says Stead and somewhat persuasively, our only firm evidence for it (i.e. Arius’ non-acknowledgement of a human soul in Jesus) is Eustathius of Antioch (1994: 33). ‘We cannot’, Haugaard declares, ‘accuse Arius of being any more specific about his doctrine of the union of the Word and the man in Jesus Christ than were his orthodox opponents’. (1960: 261). One only has to read Athanasius himself (Stead 1982b) to sense the possibility that he, too, along with his erstwhile pupil Apollinaris, may have held such a belief, even by default. The fact is that, as Stead has properly noted, there is nothing in the extant writings of Arius, including the alleged excerpts from the *Thalia* provided by Athanasius, to suggest that Arius did so.

The Logos created for creation

In both ‘genuine’ and suspect Arian texts there exist clear proofs – though probably more clearly so in the latter it must be conceded – that Arius taught that the Son was created for the (sole?) purpose of creating the universe. In Urkunde 4b the Son is said to be ‘made for us, so that God might create us by him’ and that the Son ‘exists only for creation’. In Urkunde 6 the Son is said to be the one ‘through whom [God] made both the ages and the universe’, but it is not said explicitly that this was the sole purpose for his existence. Wolfson maintains that ‘the view that the Logos was used as an intermediary in the creation of the world because of some inability on the part of God to create it directly was introduced by Asterius and adopted by Arius after the Logos had already been transformed by them into a created being’ (1958: 10; see also Barnard 1970: 181; Gregg and Groh 1981: 25). Each of these scholars is probably right, but the fact that none of the ‘genuine’ Arian writings (including Urkunde 6) attest to it explicitly must leave the assertion open to some doubt.

‘At the root of Arianism’, declares Hanson, ‘lay the conviction that God cannot communicate himself, and that ultimately the Son was a means of protecting God from contact with the world rather than a guarantee that he has involved himself in it’ (1982: 437). Arius’ God needs a mediating creature (Dragas 1981: 33). Only through the mediation of the Logos/Son can God deal with creation and yet maintain his transcendence intact and thus his freedom to be God. Again, speculation to be sure, but with a high probability of being right.

The Logos as the creature-god

Against Pollard and many earlier commentators, Stead argues that Arius took a relatively high view of the Logos, short, however, of making him coeval and consubstantial with the Father (1982a: 287). ‘There is no need for us to accept Athanasius’ claim that Arius regarded the Logos as merely one of the creatures, but rather as first-born and unique’ (1985: 157). Arius argues, maintains Dragas, for a mediator who is half-way between the uncreated God and the created universe, a mythological image of the mediator-creator who is neither eternal, nor temporal, neither true God nor true creature, but a divine-creature (1981: 30). Arius has a doctrine of creation which does not allow the possibility of a divine human person; that is, of a real revelation of God in man (ibid.: 32). For Arius, participation is only a moral concept which leaves the being of God untouched by the being of the creatures (ibid.: 35); that is, God as transcendent and thereby as free to be God. Much of what is claimed here is attractive, but must remain, short of explicit evidence to support it, as speculation. It is clearly what Athanasius and Alexander genuinely believed to be the clear (or logical) implication of what Arius was saying, but this does not make it what he actually said.

The Logos/Son as God

Yet, as Stead properly points out, any notion of the Son/Logos as mere creature in Arius’ eyes must contend with the fact that ‘in his letter to Alexander [Urkunde 6] Arius apparently called the Son *plêrês theos*, which must exclude any notion of a purely nominal deity’ (1978: 38). While the *Thalia* excerpts, as we saw above, concede Arius’ Son a conditional and qualified (even second-grade) divinity, the ‘genuine’ Arian reference has no such explicit condition or qualification. Hanson argues that the Arians wanted a God – though an inferior god, not the High God – to suffer for the sake of humankind (1988b: 112). At the heart of the Arian Gospel, he declares, is a God who suffered; that is, one ontologically capable of enduring human experiences (ibid.: 121). But is such a god truly God? Does this god provide for the genuine self-revelation and self-communication of the true God? Can such a creature-god, neither God nor human, truly save humankind?

Christ as Saviour

While in Urkunde 1 Arius declares the Son to have subsisted before time and before ages ‘as God full [of grace and truth]’, the *Thalia* excerpts offer a different view. In the *De Synodis* Arius is alleged to have called the Son God, but in a way clearly inferior or subordinate to the Supreme (God); in *Contra Arianos* that the Word is not true God, but rather God only in name and by participation (metoche). It is then only on the basis of the *Thalia* excerpts that it can be said that for Arius, whatever the actual divine status of the Son, salvation may be a form of deification (as for Athanasius) in that the Son is the prototype of ‘*theoi kata charin*’ (Wiles 1962: 339f.) Indeed, says Wiles, ‘the most fundamental reasons for the rejection of Arianism and Apollinarianism were soteriological’ (1966: 321). This would seem to support, at

least implicitly, the notion of Gregg and Groh, exemplified in the title of their controversial book, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation*, that soteriology is the most significant, even the central feature of the whole Arian scheme. For Gregg and Groh, the Son's identity with the creature is critical for the Arian scheme of salvation (1981: 65); 'in the Arian scheme of salvation (soteriology is) controlled by voluntarist rather than substantialist thinking' (ibid.: 67).

Yet the emphasis given by them to soteriology as the crucial element in Arian Christology is questioned by most, if not all their critics. While recognizing the valuable contribution made by Gregg and Groh to Arian scholarship it is clear that these critics believe that they have claimed too much (see Stead 1982a: 288; Louth 1982: 140; Meijering 1982: 68; Osborn 1984: 54). Few scholars would argue that soteriology is not one of a number of important elements in Arian Christology; they simply argue that Gregg and Groh have gone too far in seeming to claim it as the pre-eminent one.

Williams argues that in this early literature of the controversy 'the distinctiveness of the Arian position is chiefly conditioned by the distinctiveness of the particular assertions which the Arians are denying' (1983: 57). Arius asserts that his involvement in the controversy was in terms of his 'orthodox' reaction to what he perceived to be Alexander's heterodox teaching. He saw his own position, although sound in terms of Christian tradition and Scripture, as essentially reactive and not proactive (and thus not innovative).

Christ as exemplar

Gregg and Groh, as one would expect, argue that the Arians placed particular emphasis on the similarity of the Son's status to ours and on the progress of the Son in ethical behaviour (1981: 6). They speak of the Arian view that Christ shared with other creatures that progress which depends upon the steadfast choice of the good (ibid.: 146). A passage from the *Thalia*, as reported in the *Contra Arianos*, would appear to bear this out; the Word is described there as 'by nature . . . alterable (as we are)' and remaining 'good by his free will'. Yet, against this, Stead argues that the Arians represented Christ as a moral agent, not as the moral norm (1982a: 288) and that it is most unlikely that Arius thought of salvation exclusively in exemplarist terms (1994: 31, 36). It must be said, of course, in defence of Gregg and Groh, that they nowhere explicitly claim this. It must also be said, however, that while the *Thalia* passage in question does seem to suggest an identification of sorts on the part of the Son with us, Urkunde 6 speaks of the Son as a perfect creature of God, but not as one of the creatures. This would appear to negate any suggestion of an identification with the imperfect creature.

Early Arian use of Scripture

On at least three occasions in Urkunde 30 – his post-Nicaea confession of faith – Arius declares that his theology is sourced from the Holy Scriptures. After offering a brief creed-like statement, he declares that 'this faith' has been received by him and his associates from the 'holy Gospels'. He then asserts that they believe and receive

the teachings on the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as held by the whole Catholic church and as taught by the Scriptures (in which he affirms they believe in every respect). Towards the end of the letter, he reaffirms that they hold to the faith of the church and of the Holy Scriptures. If nothing else, Arius claimed clearly to have followed both the tradition of the church and the teachings of Scripture on matters Trinitarian and Christological.

The assumption that Arius was a literalist in his approach to biblical exegesis, however, is based primarily on the notion – long accepted without further argument – that he belonged to the ‘Antiochene’ School. This school, it was claimed, operated on a ‘historico-literal’ model of exegesis, while the ‘Alexandrian’ School (following the Origenist lead) was exclusively devoted to allegory. Yet more and more evidence has brought into question the very notion of such fixed schools of exegesis in this period – or in any period for that matter – and in any case whether either Antioch or Alexandria was exclusively committed to a particular exegetical approach. Few now accept that Arius was an actual pupil of Lucian of Antioch, whatever Arius’ own words might suggest (see p. 976), and Peter, bishop Alexander’s predecessor at Alexandria, and by whom Arius may indeed have been ordained, was a committed literalist. According to Williams, none of the exegetical material available to us in the extant texts supports the notion that Arius was a literalist (1987: 109). The fact that the *Thalia* was ‘a hymn to the living God of scriptural narrative’ (ibid.: 111) does not in any way require him to have been one. The same epitaph could just as easily have been applied to the arch-allegorist and ‘man of the book’ Origen. Arius was a theological exegete – with far more sophistication than many more recent scholars appreciate (though some have sought to undermine the ancient and biased view of him as a technologue driven almost exclusively by the demands of philosophical speculation which is true rather of the later Neo-Arians like Aetius) – and one, according to Williams, with no particular interest in epistemology or metaphysics in their own right (1987: 213). Arius’ commitment to the Scriptures can be seen in the efforts made by his opponents, however accurately or otherwise they may have portrayed his actual views, to counter his apparently effective use of Scripture. Athanasius’ *Contra Arianos*, particularly *Orationes* 2 and 3, are a case in point. Arius’ opponents saw the danger – that he was a biblical theologian – and sought simultaneously both to meet him on the ground of scriptural interpretation and to deny his commitment to such an enterprise by portraying him as a philosophical speculator when, in fact, his philosophical grounding was no more or less than theirs. His favourite scriptural texts appear to have included: Phil. 2:5–11; Pss. 44 and 110; Prov. 8:22–31; Heb. 1:4 and 3:1–2; Acts 2:36; and John 14:28.

Influences on Arius

The Alexandrian tradition

Many early scholars accepted, almost without question as we saw above, that the Arian controversy represented, at least in part, an Antiochene/Alexandrian divide. Wiles, however, is critical of these, particularly with respect to the notion that Arius *must* have found influences beyond the church at Alexandria and Origen (1962:

339f.). Stead agrees, arguing persuasively, as always, that an origin for Arius' theory can be found quite readily within the Alexandrian tradition itself (1964: 21). 'Whatever may be true of his adherents, Arius draws upon a Platonic tradition evolving within the Church, rather than representing a violent incursion of alien philosophy' (ibid.), drawing upon Origen, Methodius, Athenagoras, Clement and Dionysius of Alexandria. Lorenz asserts, however, that Arius cannot be explained as just a more radical subordinationist in the line of a traditional Origenist theology (in Kannengiesser 1983: 471). Hanson likewise argues that 'Arius adopted no large nor significant part of Origen's theology . . . his account of the Christian doctrine of God is perhaps fundamentally different from that of Origen' (Hanson 1987: 413). Origen contributed to many sides in the debate. With respect to the present consensus that Arius was not a disciple of Lucian of Antioch, Hanson argues, against the flow, that we must take the 'co-Lucianist' tag seriously and that Lucian may have been the source of Arius' alleged teaching of the '*soma apsychon*' (1988b: 11, 79f.).

Asterius the Sophist

Another probable influence on Arius was Asterius the Sophist. An apostate during the Maximinian persecution, Asterius earned his living as an orator and wrote the *Syntagmation* some time after Nicaea (he died c. 341). In it he defended the notion precious to Arian and later Neo-Arian alike that there cannot be two '*agenmeta*' (unbegotten entities). The almost-Nicene *Homilies on the Psalms*, which speak of a suffering God, a crucified God and a Son who is not a 'mere man' (*psilos anthropos*), which can, of course, be understood in a distinctly Arian sense, may in fact not be his (see Kinzig 1989). Several undoubtedly genuine fragments of his work have, however, survived in references from both Athanasius and Eusebius of Caesarea: God created the Son/Logos as mediator for creating, for a created nature could not endure to experience God's unmediated hand (fr. viii); the Son and the Father are one (John 10:30) both because there is a consistent and exact correspondence of their teaching and will (fr. xiii) and because there is between them an exact agreement in ideas and activities (fr. xxxii); the genesis of the Son is the Father's will (fr. xviii); it is acceptable to call the Son the 'exact image of the Father's substance' (fr. xxi); the Father and the Son are distinct hypostases (fr. xxvii) and distinct *prosopa* (persons) (fr. xxviii). There is, however, no extant record that Asterius ever claimed, as Arius probably did, that the Son was produced out of the non-existent.

With respect to the much disputed (and in my view over-emphasized) influence of philosophical thought on Arius, Gregg and Groh, according to Hanson, make a good case for the chief philosophical influence on Arius being Stoicism (1982: 433), though not with respect to the particular Stoic notion of advancement or progress in Christ; the Arian Christ cannot example human perfection for he is precisely, as '*soma apsychon*', not a man (1988b: 97). He also sees some appropriateness and sense in the suggestion that Aristotelian rather than Platonic categories lie behind Arius' thought (ibid.: 94). Kannengiesser argues for some measure of influence emanating from the thought of Plotinus. 'Arius' entire effort', he argues, 'consisted precisely in acclimatising Plotinic logic within biblical creationism' (1982: 38f.). Williams argues for the influence of Philo on Arius' notion of divine freedom (1987: 122);

Williams, Young points out, makes out a convincing case for Arius as an intellectual, the prevalent ancient characterization of him (1989: 267), much against the tide of modern opinion which has tended to portray him, against the ancient polemical view, as a rather dull literalist exegete with very little to offer to a sophisticated debate.

ARIANS AND NEO-ARIANS (HOMOIANS, ANOMOIANS AND HETEROOUSIANS)

History: the later period (337–81)

In 337 Constantine died and was succeeded by his sons Constantius II (died 361) in the East and Constantine II (died 340) and Constans (died 350) in the West. Constantius was an undisguised supporter of the anti-Nicene forces, of Eusebius of Nicomedia in particular, while the western emperors generally supported the Nicene cause. Within a few years most of the original protagonists were dead; Alexander by 328; Arius himself in 336; Eusebius of Caesarea by 340; and Eusebius of Nicomedia by 342.

In 341 a synod meeting at Antioch produced a number of credal statements, among them the so-called Second Antiochene or Dedication Creed (possibly seen by its proposers as a substitute (Hanson 1988b: 290) for Nicaea) which repudiated Arius (and especially the notion that the Son was a creature but not as one of the creatures), spoke of three hypostases, and adhered generally to the Nicene position but without the 'homoousian'. For 20 years after Nicaea no-one it seems, not even Athanasius, mentioned the latter (Hanson 1988b: 170). Antioch II was characterized by subordinationism; anti-Sabellianism (= anti-Marcellanism); and the omission of such phrases as 'from the *ousia* of the Father' and 'begotten, not made'. It may properly be called Origenist and its probable influences included Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea and Asterius (Hanson 1988b: 290). It was the last victory for the moderates (semi-Arian is an inappropriate title) in the East for a generation at least. A Fourth Antiochene Creed, traditionally associated with this 341 council but composed later by a smaller group of bishops, strengthened both the anti-Arian and the anti-Marcellan elements of Antioch II (Kopecek 1979: I, 84). In 343, at a western council in Serdica – apparently in an attempt (though abortive) to reconcile East and West (Hanson 1988b: 306), with the Easterners meeting at Philippopolis – the Latin-speaking church received Marcellus of Ancyra and repudiated the trihypostatic language of the anti-Nicene forces. For this the Greek (Origenist) suspected the Latin church of Sabellianism (as the Latin did the Greek of tritheism). Only later, under imperial pressure, did the Latin church appear to abandon Marcellus. The Philippopolis synod strengthened the anti-Marcellan tendencies of Antioch IV (Kopecek 1979: I, 85). At Antioch in 345 the so-called Macrostich (Long-lined) Creed was adopted. It spoke of no eternal generation, implied one hypostasis (but three *prosopa* or *pragmata*), did not mention '*ousia*', was subordinationist, and made certain concessions to western sensibilities but avoided any suggestion of Sabellianism. This creed was anti-Arian, anti-Marcellan and anti-Athanasian (Kopecek 1979:

I, 87). A western synod meeting in Milan later in the same year, however, virtually ignored its existence. In 346 Athanasius returned from exile.

In 350 Constans died and Constantius became sole emperor. The Arian (i.e., the Homoian) ascendancy had begun. Athanasius was condemned yet again at Arles in 355, and in 356 was re-exiled from Alexandria. In both Alexandria and Antioch anti-Nicenes became bishop. At Sirmium in 351 a creed not unlike the so-called (but incorrectly) Antioch IV (341) and with 26 anathemas was adopted. Fourteen of these were anti-Sabellian, five anti-Nicene and three opposed extreme variations of Arianism. In 357 at Sirmium a council explicitly declared the Son to be subordinate to the Father in the so-called Second Creed of Sirmium or 'Blasphemy' (according to the Nicene Hilary of Poitiers in his *De Synodis* 15). Those attending included Valens of Mursa and Ursacius. It was originally written in Latin and declared that '*ousia*' language introduced inappropriate corporeal notions into the Godhead. Hanson regards this council as a landmark in that confusion was now at an end, battle-lines were clearly drawn, and many of those moderates whose fear of the Nicene quasi-Sabellian '*homoousios*' had driven them into anti-Nicene arms now saw the clear danger of the latter (1988b: 347). In 358, for a short time, the Homoiousian Basil of Ancyra convinced the emperor (at Sirmium III) to accept '*homoiousios* (of like substance)' as an acceptable compromise, with the '*homoousian*' being declared anathema. In 358 Basil also convened what Kopecek calls 'the first self-consciously homoiousian assembly' (1979: I, 110). This gathering anathematized the alleged Aetian phrase 'unlike-in-essence' (*anomoion kat'ousian*) depicting the Father-Son relationship. For many Antioch II (341) was something of a benchmark. But this Basilian ascendancy did not last long. We might also note at this point that the associates of Basil of Ancyra (probably wrongly called the Homoiousians, for none actually used the term themselves) were troubled less by Sabellianism than by the emerging Neo-Arians. In 358 the Basilians were wary of, but had not yet rejected the notion of 'ungeneratedness' as the primary designation of God; by 359 they had done so, preferring Father-Son language along with Athanasius. The Basilians opposed the ungenerated/generated language as not properly communicating the intimate relationship between Father and Son. The Basilians now clearly saw the Neo-Arians as their main opponents, while the Homoians and Neo-Arians forged a new (though temporary) alliance against them. In 359, the year before which Athanasius had tactlessly referred to the emperor as the AntiChrist! (*Historia Arianorum*), another council meeting at Sirmium, which was convened under the influence of the new imperial favourite Valens of Mursa (the 'Arian viper' to his opponents), produced the Fourth Creed of Sirmium (called the 'Dated Creed' after the unusual intrusion into its text of the date of its promulgation) which did away with the 'homoiousian' and declared the Son to be 'like the Father in all things' (*homoios kata panta*). Later in the same year synods meeting in the West at Arminium and in the East at Seleucia (described by Kopecek as a mixture of Antioch II and IV, and the Dated Creed [1979: I, 208]) were compelled against their own apparent inclinations, since most preferred the language of Antioch II, to accept the 'like in all things', a formulation clearly susceptible to Neo-Arian interpretation. Their deliberations were presented to the emperor at Nike and at Constantinople in 360 (Kopecek 1979: II, 305 suggests that there were two such councils at Constantinople

[one in December 359 and the other in January 360]) and at the latter place, at the dedication of the Sancta Sophia church, a council formally adopted, under pressure from Valens of Mursa and supported by the Neo-Arians Aetius and Eunomius, the 'homoian' option without the qualification 'in all things'. This council, influenced no doubt by Acacius of Caesarea, decreed that no longer could 'ousia' be used to describe the divine essence, suggesting as it did a sort of divine matter. Nicaea was clearly repudiated. 'The world groaned', declared Jerome, 'to find itself Arian.' Basil of Ancyra and others of his party were exiled. Aetius was also banished and deposed from the diaconate, but more for his manner than his theology. But from 360 Athanasius and the Basilian moderates (who favoured the trihypostatic language) determined to join in alliance. Eunomius, ordained previously as deacon at Antioch, was distressed at Aetius' exile but chose, for the moment at least, to accept both the Homoian settlement and appointment as bishop at Cyzikos. Soon thereafter he was accused by some of the Cyzikan clergy, possibly for introducing a one-immersion baptism in the name of the death of Christ alone (Kopecek 1979: II, 398), and, though acquitted at trial before Eudoxius of Constantinople, was angered by the latter's alleged failure to keep a promise to expedite the recall of Aetius and went into self-imposed exile. He now began the process of forming a Neo-Arian sect in place of an ecclesiastical party (Kopecek 1979: II, 398, 414). He was summoned by Constantius to defend himself at Antioch in 361 but continued to enjoy considerable clerical and popular support there, including some, though later abandoned, from Eudoxius the Homoian bishop of the city.

In 361 Constantius died and was succeeded by Julian the Apostate (361–3). An adherent of the old paganism, he recalled all exiles (including Aetius, the friend of his brother the Caesar Gallus) and exercised toleration as a way of setting all the Christian protagonists at one another's throats. Basil now began his *Contra Eunomium* as a Neo-Arian synod got under way in Constantinople in 362. Julian was succeeded by Jovian (363–4) who favoured the Nicenes and Athanasius; he was in turn succeeded by Valentinian I (364–75) in the West who was 'neutral in religious differences', and his brother Valens (364–78) in the East who was inclined to the Homoian party. In 367 both Aetius and Eunomius were briefly banished for allegedly supporting the would-be usurper Procopius the previous year. Aetius died soon thereafter. We now enter the period of the Cappadocian Fathers – Basil and the two Gregories – who dealt most resolutely with the issue of the deity of the Holy Spirit and most vigorously with Eunomius. In 370 Eunomius was re-exiled for Neo-Arian activity in Cappadocia and in 378 returned to both Constantinople and Antioch. In the latter he presided over a synod of Neo-Arian metropolitans.

In 378 Valens died in battle against the Goths and was succeeded in the East (Gratian was emperor in the West) by the Spaniard Theodosius. His accession swung the tide the Nicene way and opened the door, beginning at Antioch in 379, to the eventual Nicene settlement at Constantinople in 381, where both the '*homoousion*' was re-established and the deity of the Holy Spirit affirmed. An edict of Theodosius prior to Constantinople had proscribed both Arians and Neo-Arians, by which they were not permitted to use churches within towns of the eastern empire. Canon 1 of the council itself anathematized Neo-Arians, Arians and others. Soon after the council a new edict specifically proscribed the building by Neo-Arians of new churches

even in the countryside. Another declared that all existing Arian and Neo-Arian churches must be surrendered to Nicene-faithful parties, and another, after Theodosius' abortive Unity Conference in 383, proscribed their meeting even in private homes, as well as their rituals and ordinations. Neo-Arianism was now effectively illegal. Eunomius was banished for non-compliance with the edicts, and after his death in the early 390s, Neo-Arianism was rent by schism. In the West at Aquileia, under Ambrose, Arianism was also defeated in the Balkan provinces, although as Daniel Williams' (1995) book demonstrates (and Ambrose's own letters reveal), Arianism was far from dead in the West at this time. In 386 Valentinian II, now the western emperor, promulgated a new edict allowing worship to (Homoian) adherents of Rimini (359) and Constantinople (360).

ARIAN AND NEO-ARIAN DOCUMENTS OF THE LATER PERIOD

Like the extant works of Arius himself, those of the later Arians (Homoians) and Neo-Arians are few in number. The *Syntagmation* of Aetius (written towards the end of 359; Hanson 1988b: 600), which defends the alleged Neo-Arian watchword '*anomoios*', probably in response to Athanasius' *De Decretis* (Hanson 1988b: 606), is one. The extant writings of Eunomius of Cyzicus are, thankfully, more voluminous and not only for the extracts to be found in Basil's and Gregory of Nyssa's refutations of his theology. We have his fully extant *First Apology* (written in 359; Hanson 1988b: 618), where he defends the notion, against the Homoiousians, that the proper name for deity is 'Ungenerated', and his *Second Apology* (*Apologia Apologiae*) (written in 378/9 [Books 1 and 2] and 382/3 [Books 3, 4 and 5] against Basil's *Adversus Eunomium*), which is found mainly in Gregory's work directed against it. We also have his *Confession of Faith* (written probably for the emperor Theodosius' 383 unity conference; Hanson 1988b: 618) and snippets of other works preserved in the writings of his opponents.

The Homoians

Hanson (1988b: 557) properly argues that a distinction should be made between Homoianism and what Kopecek has called Neo-Arianism (and others less properly Anomoianism but more appropriately Heteroousianism). (1988: 557). For the Homoians were not 'Unlikers' (as probably the Neo-Arians were not as well). The Homoians (so favoured by Valens) were little interested in philosophical speculation, and were more inclined to engage in a literal than an allegorical exegesis of the biblical text (ibid.: 559). The two main leaders of eastern Homoianism were Acacius of Caesarea and Eudoxius (although he was also, for a time, politically if not theologically supportive of Aetius and Eunomius), and those of the West Ulfilas, the missionary to the Goths, Valens of Mursa, Ursacius of Singidunum, Germinius of Sirmium, Palladius of Ratiaria and Auxentius of Milan.

Their two main credal formulations were those of Sirmium II (357) and Nike-Constantinople (360), although Ulfilas' Rule of Faith and the Creed of Auxentius of

Milan were also significant in the West (Hanson 1988b: 558f.). Their theology was essentially a development of that of Eusebius of Caesarea and is characterized mainly by a profound distaste for the word '*ousia*' and its derivatives with respect to the relationship of Father and Son. Thus, they preferred the term '*homoios*' without further qualification. It can be said that their 'party', as such, dates only from the time of Sirmium II. They saw themselves as deeply attached to the scriptural text; 'what I read, is what I believe', said one. The description of the Father–Son relationship should be restricted to the limits of scriptural language and '*homoousios*', '*homoiousios*', and '*heteroousios*' avoided at all costs. They disavowed the name of 'Arian' and claimed to be upholding the traditional faith (ibid.: 561). Their emphases included the ignorance of Jesus; his disavowal of his own goodness; that Jesus was a created being called by divine grace; that the Son was produced wholly from the Father's will; that the Son's praying to the Father demonstrates their inequality; and that the Father is simply incomparable.

For Acacius of Caesarea, the disciple of his predecessor Eusebius (from 341–66), and whose leadership was as much political as doctrinal (Hanson 1988b: 583), the Son is the exact image of the Father in all respects save one; he is not unbegotten. There are two distinct hypostases (much Arian thought was clearly directed against Marcellus of Ancyra), Ingenerate and Son, and while the latter can be called God (and possibly is God) he is not God as the Ingenerate/Father is God. In Eusebius of Emesa (c. 300–59; bishop from 340/1), the distinct existence of the Son is maintained against the Sabellians (Marcellus as the new Sabellius?) and the language of obedience is regularly applied to the Son. Palladius, Ambrose's formidable opponent at Aquileia in 381, spoke of a Trinity comprising the one High-God, one demi-god, and one superior angel, and of an ontological distinction between them (Hanson 1988b: 564). The Son was not created out of nothing and his begetting implies that he is from the Father's will. The Incarnation, along the lines of Phil. 2:9, comprises a reduction of divinity. A drastic subordinationism is central to his (and all Homoian) thought. The Father is God of the Son and, for that reason, the Son worships the Father. The Son is properly the High Priest of the Father, as declared in Hebrews 3. Father and Son are alike in energy, power and activity but not in substance. The Homoousians are guilty of both Sabellianism and of tritheism! (Hanson 1988b: 577). Ulphilas reflects a theology which is clearly concerned with subordination and obedience, the Father is God of the Son, the Holy Spirit is not God but only minister of Christ, the Son (like with Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea and Rufinus) is a 'second God', and the Father is creator of our creator. Valens and Ursacius were the main architects of Sirmium II and Germinius one of those who drew up the 359 Dated Creed. Later (in the mid-360s probably) he abandoned the Homoians and went over to those who looked primarily to Antioch II.

Homoianism was less technical and less sophisticated (but more popular) than Neo-Arianism (Hanson 1988b: 597). The areas of difference between the Homoians and the Neo-Arians comprised the comprehensibility of God, the mutability or immutability of the Son, the use of philosophical language, and the formula for describing the Son's likeness to the Father.

The Neo-Arians

With Aetius and Eunomius, it is generally agreed, later Arian theology became a form of technology. It is perhaps true also that 'Anomoian' is not the appropriate title for this party (Hanson 1988b: 598). Many Neo-Arians repudiated any suggestion that the Son is always, without further qualification, 'unlike' the Father.

Aetius was a pupil of both Paulinus of Tyre and Athanasius of Anazarbus. He was famous for his use of syllogisms. He was ordained deacon by the Arian Leontius in Antioch in 346 and then released from the diaconate in order to pursue a teaching career in Antioch and Alexandria (348–50) where he first taught the young Cappadocian Eunomius. In 357 he was reappointed deacon by another Cappadocian, George of Alexandria, an early supporter of the Neo-Arians. For Aetius the real problem was whether or not a created ingenerate (that is, an uncreated Logos) was logically possible. Being caused belonged to the very essence of the Son. God's being named as 'Father' does not imply any participation by the Son in his essence (Kopecek 1979: I, 124). The essential contrast for Aetius was between the Ingenerate One (God) and the (created/generated) Son. For Aetius (and for Eunomius) ingeneracy is the very essence of God that is, is God. Therefore, the Son, not being ingenerate, cannot be God, and not being God, cannot be ingenerate. Therefore, the Son can be neither homoousios nor homoiousios to the Father.

To our knowledge the *Syntagmation* of Aetius does not discuss the Incarnation; what matters primarily to Aetius is 'knowing God' (John 17:3) (Hanson 1988b: 606). For him different names (e.g. Father and Son) indicate different natures. Names express realities and are not mere conventional symbols. The word 'Ingenerate' is not just one name for the Father but his very essence. Neither is it a mere privative, for then the Father would be non-existent, which would be absurd, or there would have to be a prior status – generatedness – which the Father would then lack. He also preferred creator/created language for the Father–Son for it implied both no passion on the part of God and that the created Son is both complete and fixed from the outset and therefore not mutable (Kopecek 1979: I, 171). Aetius rarely mentions either the Bible or Christ (Hanson 1988b: 610) and the *Syntagmation* itself has only one recognizable scriptural reference, John 17:3 in Syllogism 37. God, the true God, cannot beget; therefore, Aetius implies, he cannot have a true Son. God can only be known intellectually; he cannot communicate himself. He is known only by being known as the Ingenerate One. Aetius employs logical analysis to prove his case. He employs neither '*anhomoios*' nor '*beteroousios*'. Philostorgius, the later Arian apologist, preferred the latter term, since for him the Son was unchangeably like the Father in some respects, but not in *ousia*, although he opted for 'incomparable (*asugkrito*n) in *ousia*'. All 37 propositions found in the *Syntagmation* concern the relationship of Father and Son, and none the Incarnation. For Kopecek, Syllogism 32 implies even that the Son is significant religiously, however cosmologically so, only as a means through which to approach the one God (1979: II, 95); this is, he says, a 'radical Christian monotheism'. Aetius is a rationalist and his theology is essentially metaphysical (Hanson 1988b: 611).

Eunomius, a pupil of Aetius, was not a strict believer in the Son being *anomoios* ('unlike') the Father; for him the Son is like the Father 'according to the scriptures',

but not in *ousia*. He was comfortable with the term '*heteroousios*' (Kopecek [1979: 330] sees this implied at least in Eunomius' *First Apology* 20). As with Aetius, the true name and thus the true nature of divinity is the Ungenerated (*Apologia Apologiae* 382). God is the Ingenerate (*First Apol.* 7) and, therefore, the Incomparable. The Ungenerate does not admit comparison (*homoiousion*) with the Generate One (*First Apol.* 9; see John 14:28). The Ingenerate is no mere title or privative. The Son is related to God only by the activity that produced him and is similar to this cause. The Son's likeness is to the Father's activity and will and not to his essence (*First Apol.* 24). The Father is God's will. Father and Son are then 'alike'; God and the Son can only be 'unlike'. But this activity of God is temporary and its product will cease when the cause shall cease. No act of begetting goes on forever but comes to an end; therefore, it must have a beginning (*Apol. Apol.* 224). God's will and purpose are not identical with God's essence, for the act of willing has both a beginning and an end (*First Apol.* 23). God exists apart and prior to the Begotten One and therefore the latter was not before his begetting (*Apol. Apol.* 224). Eunomius' theology is established on the principle that God is the cause of all things and a cause *must* pre-exist what it causes (Kopecek 1979: III, 12). Indeed, strictly speaking, God cannot beget – for the '*agenetos*' cannot beget '*gennetos*' (Hanson 1988b: 622) – but only create.

The essence of the Son is begotten(ness) (*First Apol.* 12). To call the Son a '*gennema*' (product) is to describe his *ousia* and hypostasis. The Son was begotten when he was as yet not, but was not one of those things brought into existence '*ex ouk ontōn*' (*First Apol.* 15). The Son is the only essence which exists as a hypostasis by means of the Father's activity; the Son is 'direct' from the Father's hand. The Son is the perfect minister of the whole creativity and purpose of the Father (*First Apol.* 18). The Son is like the Father as to will but not as to essence (*First Apol.* 18) and therefore not a real Son (Hanson 1988b: 625). The Fatherhood of God is an *energeia* and therefore separate from God's essence and temporary. There is a fundamental distinction between the divine *ousia* and the divine *energeia*. Thus the real distinction, as with Aetius, is between the Ingenerate One and the Son, not between Father and Son. Col. 1:15–16 proves that the Son is the image of the Father's activity (Kopecek 1979: II, 340). The Holy Spirit lacks godhead altogether, even of an inferior brand (*First Apol.* 25). The Son is offspring but not as other offspring (*First Apol.* 28). The Son is not made Son or God because of obedience but because he is 'Son' and Only-Begotten (*Expositio fidei* 3). In Eunomius' extant writings there are no references to the Incarnation (as with Aetius). As with Aetius, different names mean different realities. God, for Eunomius, cannot communicate God's own self. Eunomianism is, says Kopecek, 'thoroughgoing Arianism presented in its full consistency and justified with a comprehensive theory of language' (1979: II, 330). For Eunomius, God did not become man, but only the Son/Word did so, being in the form of God. God is 'inactive'; the Son 'acted out God's love' (1979: II, 493).

One interesting notion in Eunomius is that God cannot know more about his own essence than we can; for his essence is his unbegottenness and we can know that (fr. ii). Divine simplicity indeed! Thus God, for Eunomius – unlike for the orthodox or even for Arius – is knowable. For Eunomius Greek philosophy can explain all questions about God (Hanson 1988b: 630). Reason (that is, correct method) is the final court of appeal (Hanson 1988b: 631). And yet, Eunomius has 'a deep, almost

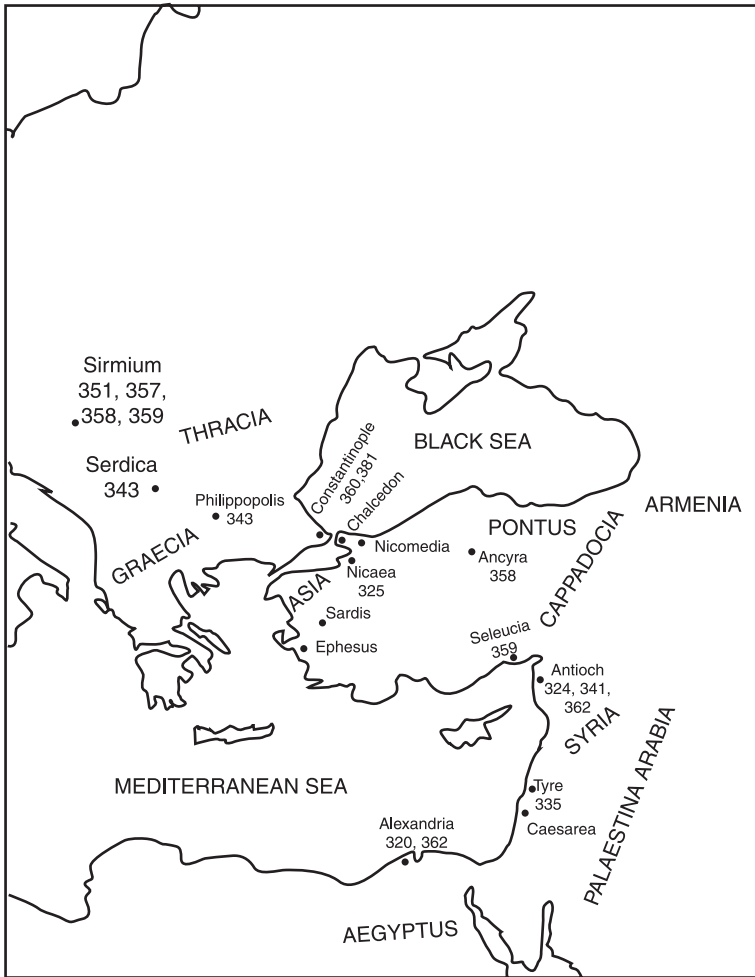


Figure 38.2 Sites and dates of councils and other major centres during the Arian controversy in the eastern empire.

literalist respect for Scripture' (ibid.). Given that Eunomius himself became more and more exegetical over time – as witness the progression from the *First Apology* to the *Apologia Apologiae* to the *Expositio Fidei* – and that much of the schismatic activity after Eunomius' death was exegetically driven, is it true to say that Neo-Arianism was in the end purely dialectic and rationalistic?

CONCLUSION

We now return to the question at the beginning of this chapter. Is there such a thing as fourth-century Arianism? Do the thoughts of Arius, the Eusebeians, the



Figure 38.3 Sites and dates of councils and other major centres during the Arian controversy in the western empire.

Homoians and the Neo-Arians (Eunomians) have much in common? Or was the designation 'Arian' simply a convenient polemical tool? Were there Arians, as such, only in the minds of Athanasius and his allies? The answer is not simple. On the one hand, there is clearly no unified group to which such a designation could readily apply; on the other, there is clearly in the fourth century a movement of thought against which persons like Athanasius and Hilary, and even Marcellus and Eustathius, did react. The various groupings called by history 'Arian' – if not by themselves, for even Arius would have eschewed the title, believing himself only a simple, biblical Christian – do share a number of common beliefs or points of doctrine.

They declared belief in the one God who is absolutely transcendent and who does not, indeed cannot share his essence. They deny the possibility of eternal generation, believing the Son to be a product of the Father's will. For them the '*agennetos*' stands fundamentally over against the '*gennemata*'. For them too, '*gennema*' and '*poiema*' are

identical terms. The Father/God is 'agennetos/agenetos'; the Son/Logos is 'gennetos/genetos'; to them one 'nu' was as good as another! Father and Son are inherently unequal (Butler 1992: 365).

Yet, while for some God is comprehensible to the human mind as simply and essentially 'agennetos' (Neo-Arian 'N'), to others he is ultimately incomprehensible (Arius — 'A'). For some the possession of 'epinoiai', the human conceptions or human inventions by which we talk indirectly about God,¹ suggests God as composite, and thereby as not simple (N); for others again 'epinoiai' are a marvellous means of expressing the very richness of God (A). Some repudiated 'homoousios' and 'homoiousios' but liked 'heteroousios', for God is incomparable; others could bear 'homoiousios' but never 'homoousios' (A); others again preferred no 'ousia' language at all for God's being, opting simply for 'homoios' (Homoians). For some salvation is purely in knowing God (that is, in knowing God's pure essence as 'Ungenerated' [N]); for others salvation comes through ethical imitation of the Son, the god-creature (A). For some the Son was mutable by nature (A); for the others he could not be mutable and redeemer at the same time (N). Some saw the creation of the Son as for the purpose of creation (A); for others this threatened, even unintentionally, to make the Son inferior to the created order (N). For some, orthodox three-immersion/three-name baptism was appropriate (A); for others, it was to be one immersion in the single name of Christ's death (N).

Arians there were in the fourth century. Arius Arians (at least one of them); Eusebeian Arians; Homoian Arians; Aetian—Eunomian Arians; and even Athanasian Arians (at least in his mind). And none loved the others any more than they were loved by those who feared and hated them.

Likewise in the late twentieth century it is probably unwise to attach such a label too readily, if at all, to any particular theological position. Given that problems of definition and identification, with particular respect here to the notion of 'Arianism', were such major issues in the fourth-century debates, this can hardly be any less so in this century. It is therefore perhaps often inappropriate, not to say simply incorrect, to employ the term as a form of criticism in the context of modern theological disputation.

NOTE

- 1 Origen, Arius and the Cappodocians favoured them as a way of speaking about the transcendent, unknowable God, while Eunomius believed that they suggested a composite God and denied the notion of God as simply 'Unbegotten'.

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PART IX

PROFILES



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ORIGEN

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Fred Norris

INTRODUCTION: THE ENIGMA OF ORIGEN

Origen (c. 185–c. 251–4) is always in the eye of the beholder. Although he was the greatest early theologian of the East – only Augustine is comparable in the West – his corpus is remarkably fragmentary and fragile. He warned in his own lifetime that copies of a debate which he had with another theologian had been interpolated and rewritten by his opponent (Jerome, *Apologia Contra Rufinum* 42–4; Hritz 1965; Laudet 1982; Rufinus, *De alteratione librorum Origenis* 10–13; Dell’Era 1983). In Arabia to serve as a skilled expert in a meeting which was to focus on the questionable positions of a bishop named Heraclides, his own views came under scrutiny when another bishop asked him if the soul is the blood. His response shows how deeply concerned he was with simple believers’ understandings of material language used in scripture for things spiritual. It is so clumsy that a third bishop summarizing Origen’s views gives the impression that Origen relies more on Platonists than scripture (Origen, *Dialogue with Heraclides*; Scherer 1960; Daly 1992). At home in Alexandria, Demetrius, his bishop, had supported him early in his youth, but became quite angry with him when he was ordained by bishops in Palestine (Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.8, 19, 23 Schwartz and Mommsen 1903, 1908; Lawlor and Oulton 1927). After Origen’s death, his reputation changed with the tides. His scriptural exegesis of whole books and short passages, however, stayed for the most part within various traditions of orthodoxy.

Augustine, particularly in his *Retractiones*, remade himself for posterity on his own terms, but Origen died, probably in the Decian persecution, without rearranging himself. We have possibly three complete letters from him, although Eusebius of Caesarea knew a nine-volume collection of at least one hundred epistles (*H. E.* 6.36.3) and Jerome found at least four different collections of correspondence in Caesarea when he worked in that city. Because Origen left no guide for understanding his works like Augustine’s, he provokes more contradictory readings than most ancient Christian figures. Tradition tells us that in the fourth century Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus put together the *Philochalia*, a selection from Origen’s writings which attempted to bring together in a favourable light some of his most compelling insights (Junod 1976; Harl 1983). One of the reasons that we



Figure 39.1 Lithograph of Origen, after a relief by Michael Burghers. From Cave (1687: 213)

have only a few examples of sustained biblical commentary from the Cappadocians is probably their dependence upon his brilliant and extensive efforts.

After Origen's death, those who most valued him found it necessary to write in his defence. Gregory Thaumaturgus, one of his students and later bishop of Neocæsarea in Cappadocia, wrote a eulogy to him which gives details of his teacher's approach to Greek literature as a tool for Christian mission and learning (Crouzel 1969; Salmon 1975). Pamphilus (c. 240–309), a presbyter at Caesarea in Palestine and a scholar/teacher there, himself transcribed most of Origen's works which Jerome later used (Jerome, *De viris illustribus* 75; in Richardson 1896, 1952; Slusser

1998); he also wrote an *Apologia* for Origen, now only partially extant in a Latin translation (Migne, PG 17: 521–616). His student Eusebius (c. 260–c. 339), the noted church historian who provides important information on Origen's life, also wrote an *Apologia*, in at least two books, which is no longer preserved.

The debate about Origen's orthodoxy is reflected in other sources. The life of the towering figure in Egyptian monasticism, Pachomius (c. 292–346), comes down to us in different language traditions. The Greek one, most often considered a secondary source, has Pachomius condemn Origen, but the Bohairic Coptic biography, the primary source, contains no such reference. Those composing the Greek life evidently were so fearful that monasticism might be tarred with the brush of Origen that they saved Pachomius by making him a critic of the Alexandrian (Goehring 1997: 75–6).

In the fifth century, both Rufinus and Jerome translated Origen's *Peri archôn* (*On First Principles*; Koetschau 1913; Görgemanns and Karpp 1976; Crouzel and Simonetti 1978–84; Butterworth 1966), and fought bitterly over the results. Rufinus tells his readers that he does not render all of Origen's original because the Greek text he possesses suffers from serious interpolations. He also does not want to spoil the Alexandrian's acceptance in the West with unending discussions of unimportant points, but he makes no changes except on the basis of what he has read in other writings from Origen. We have Rufinus' translation. Jerome responded with his own translation and accused Rufinus of taking out or softening the heretical opinions of Origen and thus creating a warped impression. Jerome's full translation is lost. Only a few extracts remain (Quasten 1953: 73–4). They sometimes appear in later efforts to prove that Origenism was wrong and that Origen was a heretic. The *Philochalia* (Junod 1976) contains the fourth book of *Peri archôn* in Greek; some other Greek fragments are available. The fullest text of the work, however, is the translation of Rufinus. The first modern critical edition inserted 43 fragments from the Origenist controversy in places where the editor decided that they belonged, fragments both from Jerome and from later figures or groups who castigated Origen (Koetschau 1913). Two new critical editions in the last quarter century, however, have rejected that practice as misguided in two directions: first, in believing the worst representation of Origen; and second, in deciding where the floating quotations should fit into the piece itself (Görgemanns and Karpp 1976; Crouzel and Simonetti 1978–84; Norris 1994).

As if these developments were not difficult enough, the actual proceedings of the Fifth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 553 also leave us in a quandary. In the eleventh anathema of that council, Origen's name is listed as one of seven condemned theologians, but he appears out of chronological order and thus seems to stand as almost a symbol of problems with Origenism, a posture that centred on a style of theological thinking that marked the wider debate of the sixth century (Daley 1995). Yet in the council's 14 anathemas neither his doctrinal errors nor those of later Origenism are specified (*Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*; Tanner *et al.* 1990, esp. Anathema 11). Theodore Askidas noted that Origen had been condemned after his death, perhaps not first at the 553 council but in an edict of 543 signed by Pope Vigilius and other bishops (*Sacrorum conciliorum*; Mansi *et al.* 1960–1: IX, 272). At the same time 15 anathemas against Origenism, reflecting teachings

from Evagrius of Pontus rather than those from Origen himself (Guillaumont 1962), have come down to us as related to the council. There is also a letter from emperor Justinian to Mennas, bishop of Constantinople, which contains a series of extracts from Origen's *Peri archôn* that Justinian found suspect (*Sacrorum conciliorum*; Mansi *et al.* 1960–1: IX, 524–33). We are left with the odd situation that we do not know if the Fifth Ecumenical Council officially discussed or rejected Origenism, but that it listed Origen as an heretical teacher while no mention is made of what he taught that must be condemned (Gray 1979: 70–1; Clark 1992: 249). Thus this formative theologian of the East was adjudged both enigmatic and problematic. The obvious conciliar contrast with the bishop of Hippo appears in the strong defence of Augustine's later positions, as he defined them, by Caesarius of Arles and the 25 canons reflecting his views which were accepted as the definitive western understanding of theology at the Council of Orange in 529.

The central concern of this chapter is a sympathetic reading of this master. The official posthumous condemnation of a teacher over three hundred years after his death smacks of little historical understanding, particularly of the development of doctrine (Drewery 1985; Vogt 1987). About fifty years after Origen's demise, Eusebius elected not to speak of all the inspiring stories about him which were still told by the elders of that era (Eusebius, *H. E.* 6.33.4). Origen, as a monk who probably preached daily and wrote commentaries on nearly every book of the Bible, who wanted to avoid both questionable doctrine and practice, viewed himself as a devoted churchman (Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 7.6; Baehrens 1921; Jaubert 1960; Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 16.6; Crouzel *et al.* 1962; Lienhard 1992). The church has not continuously embraced him, but the benefits of his work are too many to be cast aside as totally overshadowed by the shortcomings.

ORIGEN'S LIFE

Origen was born in Alexandria in about 185 CE into a Christian family, perhaps of recent converts. Its deep piety is displayed in the martyrdom of his father, Leonides, while his son was still young. Eusebius recounts how Origen himself avoided martyrdom in his teens only because his unnamed mother hid his clothes and thus did not let him go outside the house (*H. E.* 6.2). Eusebius tells us another tale, one that depicts Origen castrating himself in a carefully considered act of piety (*H. E.* 6.8). Whether true or false, the story indicates how hallowed hagiography attributed to him feats of overachieving, perhaps overreaching, holiness.

Such remarkable passions, combined with his intellectual brilliance, made him in his late teens the primary teacher in the Christian school at Alexandria. We should not doubt that a number of the more obvious candidates had been killed in persecutions, but every scrap of information we have about Origen, whether praising or attacking him, demands that we take him seriously as a Christian intellectual and scholar whose greatest interest was in centring the church on its scripture through the rule of faith. From boyhood the Bible had been his mainstay, memorized under his father's urging, deepened in public worship and questioned for its meaning within the loving confines of the home; prayer three times a day was the common

practice. His father had also led him through classical Greek texts that formed the regular early education of upper-class children in Alexandria.

On his father's death, which probably entailed the confiscation of family property, a wealthy woman took responsibility for the boy's welfare. Although she had within her entourage an Antiochene teacher of suspect gnostic faith named Paul, Origen supposedly fended off his heretical teachings, did not pray with him and kept to the rule of faith which he had been taught. He evidently used the financial support to study with Ammonius Saccas, a noted Middle Platonist in Alexandria; at the same time he visited Christians in prison. Thus in spite of his age, he was worthy of the catechetical position, not the least because of his lived piety and his deep education in both the church and the academy. Students from both arenas came to study with him. Most took up what he commended as the true philosophic life even to the point of Christian martyrdom; others sought him out initially to learn more about the Greek heritage.

His growing reputation led him to visits with Christian friends and other churches: at least those in Rome, Jerusalem, the Caesareas in Palestine and Capadocia, Nicomedia, congregations in Greece and others in 'Arabia'. One story tells of his meeting the emperor Alexander Severus' mother, Mamaea, at Antioch when she wanted to find out about this famous fellow. Origen left Alexandria in the early 230s during a dispute with his bishop, Demetrius, and took up permanent residence in Palestinian Caesarea among bishops who highly valued his biblical interpretation. On a previous visit, those bishops had listened intently to his homilies from scripture. Demetrius strongly objected to such preaching by a layman in the hearing of bishops, but the Palestinian leaders found the practice an accepted one within the church. Demetrius was able to recall the teacher on the first occasion, but then was adamant in his rebuke when Origen accepted the priesthood at the hands of those Palestinian bishops.

Origen finally experienced the martyrdom which early called him and had claimed his father. During a period of persecution, perhaps in 251 or a bit later, he succumbed to torture. In his last painful days he wrote letters of encouragement to others, ones unfortunately now lost (Eusebius, *H. E.* 6.1–5, 8, 14–19, 21, 23–32, 36–9; Schwartz and Mommsen 1903; Lawlor and Oulton 1927; Pamphilus, *Apologia pro Origene*; Migne *et al.* 1857)

ORIGEN'S WRITINGS

Origen began his writing career rather early. Another Alexandrian patron, a certain Ambrose, paid for seven scribes who in shifts took dictation from the prodigy. Preaching on scripture and composing commentaries on its text became the core of his intellectual life. Were he to teach on a modern theological faculty, he would probably be a professor of Old Testament, but one with so many interests in all the theological disciplines that in essence he would be a faculty in himself, yet more missionary, holistic and helpful than many.

His *Hexapla* was a piece without peer. He took the trouble to learn Hebrew, according to Eusebius not at all a common undertaking of Christian scholars. Thus

his *Hexapla* began with the Hebrew text extant among Jews, probably not represented in Hebrew characters but by a transliteration of the Hebrew into Greek characters. Greek translations by Aquila and Symmachus came next, followed by a column devoted to the Septuagint. Any clause not in the Hebrew but in the Septuagint was set off with an obelus. Any Hebrew clause not in the Greek was designated with an asterisk. A translation into Greek by Theodotian formed the fifth column and a selection of other translations the sixth, although on occasion, as in Psalms, he made use of three more unnamed translations, one found not long before in a jar at Jericho. Apparently for those less concerned with the Hebrew, he also created a *Tetrapla* which was comprised of the four major Greek translations. This is surely one of the most unusual early textual projects of the church, although we do not know how many manuscripts Origen used for either his Hebrew text transliterated in Greek or his Septuagint text. Thus we have little idea how much this work involved the building of a critical text of scripture itself. In many ways he was not as deeply interested in the kind of textual study that fascinated Jerome, i.e., the establishment of the best text. Origen often preferred the richness of the variations as sources for his theological reflections.

Probably only one exemplar of the *Hexapla* ever existed. Now it remains in fragments, a Syriac copy of the fifth column, and in occasional comments in a few manuscripts of the Old Testament and a few extracts in writings of other Church Fathers (Nautin 1977: 303–61; Wright 1988; Munnich 1995).

Origen certainly did not begin commentary on Christian Scripture (Grant 1993). One translator of the Old Testament text, Symmachus, himself a Jewish Christian (Eusebius, *H. E.* 6.17; Schwartz and Mommsen 1903; Lawlor and Oulton 1927) had written a commentary on Matthew. A gnostic, Heracleon (only partially extant: Brooke 1967), mentioned by Origen in his own *eis to kata euaggelion Ioannên exêgêtikôn*, (*Commentary on John*), had previously commented on that Gospel. But Origen was considered a master interpreter of scripture. In terms of both homilies and commentaries, he seems to have dealt with almost every book of the Bible. One of the saddest aspects of his career is that so little of that remarkable effort has reached us. Jerome (*Epistle* 33) says that Origen created scholia on Exodus, Leviticus, Isaiah, Psalms 1–15, Ecclesiastes and the Gospel of John. None of them are fully extant (Junod 1995), although certain *catenae* have some of the comments as does the *Philochalia* (Junod 1976; Harl 1983).

Quasten (1953: 46–7) noted that of 574 homilies known to us, only 20 in Greek and others in Latin are extant. Fully 388 are lost. The decision not to copy them, or to suppress them because of the Origenist controversy, leaves us without the many insights into Christian spirituality and mysticism which so richly enhanced much of Origen's corpus. Scripture spoke to him of deeper things than those which capture the attention of many modern historical-critical exegetes. Crouzel (1984: 75) insightfully insists that he preached in ways which remind us of the pastoral skills of a spiritual director.

The commentaries have fared a bit better, but many of them are no longer extant. Not one comes to us complete. Of the 25 books on Matthew, only eight survive in Greek. An anonymous Latin translation contains comments from 22:34–27:65 not contained in the Greek, but both texts lack reflections on 1:1–13:35 (Klostermann

1933, 1935, 1941; Girod 1970). Jerome's *Commentariorum in Matheum* (Hurst and Adriaen 1969; Bonnard 1977, 1979) depends much on Origen's work where the relationship can be checked. But we are left with uncertainty about the rest. Only eight of at least 32 books on John remain. Fifteen books on Romans are now reduced to a few Greek fragments in various sources and a ten-book translation into Latin by Rufinus which uses a Latin biblical text as its base (Bauernfeind 1923). Another Latin translation by Rufinus, this time of a commentary *In Canticum Canticorum* (Baehrens 1925), contains only four of the ten books. Jerome found that work to be the best of Origen's efforts.

Quasten (1953: 51) says that of 291 books of commentary, 275 are lost: 13 on Genesis, evidently some on Kings, 46 on 41 psalms, 30 on Isaiah, five on Lamentations, 25 on Ezekiel, 25 on the minor prophets, 15 on Luke, five on Galatians, three on Ephesians, as well as some on Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Hebrews, Titus and Philemon. Only fragments remain in *catenae*, the margins of biblical manuscripts and quotations by other fathers.

Origen's *Peri archôn* (Koetschau 1913; Görgemanns and Karpp 1976; Crouzel and Simonetti 1978–84; Butterworth 1966) gives us a glimpse into his hermeneutic. The work has been viewed not only as a kind of sounding into the depths of theology, or an early attempt at systematics, but also as a piece itself centred on scriptural exegesis and the themes and questions which emerge when a brilliant scholar comes to the texts with the theological questions of his age (Daley 1998). The introduction carefully sets out both the affirmations and limits of Christian faith in its relationship to biblical interpretation. For Origen the rule of faith directs the church's teaching by leading it into what it will find expressed in the Bible. That is the rock from which Christian faith is hewn. But outside its boundaries there are remarkable areas of speculation which one seeking further knowledge should pursue. Any sound theology depends upon the life reflected in the rule of faith, yet there is no harm in playing with other questions which the interpreter or the world may want to ask. The simplest truths of scripture and the rule of faith will save the simple. The enlightened, however, may, indeed must, look into higher concerns (*Peri archôn*, Introduction; Koetschau 1913; Crouzel and Simonetti 1978–84; Butterworth 1966).

The very structure of scripture itself includes difficulties which alert the true learner to deeper meaning, ones which do not allow the exegete to be absorbed in the study of language alone. Things stated that are unworthy of God induce the student to turn from the letter to hear more from the Spirit. The primary aim of the biblical texts is to connect spiritual events that have already transpired with those that have yet to occur. To do that the Word brought into unity important mystical events and actual historical events. But scripture also tells tales which did not happen, ones that could never have happened, and ones that could have but did not (*Peri archôn* 4.2.9; Koetschau 1913; Görgemanns and Karpp 1976; Crouzel and Simonetti 1978–84; Butterworth 1966).

Picking up such cues by carefully reading scripture frees one's imagination, or, rather, empowers it to consider what would be worthy of God. Origen had been from his youth not only a student of Christian texts but also of texts from Greek philosophy, religion and other subjects. Gregory Thaumaturgus (*The Oration and*

Panegyric Addressed to Origen; Crouzel 1969; Salmon 1975; Slusser 1998) details how he led his students through those texts while he was a teacher in Caesarea of Palestine. He read them as they were being read, allegorically in the best and traditional ways. Hellenistic teachers of his era and earlier had interpreted valued ancient texts through categories of contemporary values. Not only the ancient classics like Homer, but also honoured philosophical, historical and medical texts were read with the sense that within them there were clues as to how their apparently odd stories and truisms were to be taken with seriousness in the third century. Since the Protestant Reformation this type of interpretation has struck many biblical scholars as an uncontrolled, subjective perversion of texts, yet it was the preferred way in which educated Hellenistic intellectuals reclaimed their sacred books. Origen's biblical project seems neither so odd nor so original when it is placed within the communities of readers who populated both Alexandria and Caesarea (Dawson 1992). Indeed, his penchant for offering more than one possible interpretation of a text rather than insisting that each verse has only one meaning alerts us to his sense of theology as a research programme which cannot be easily systematized (Vogt 1980; Crouzel 1984). Various points of his theology are given different, even contradictory expression, but their inclusion demonstrates not only his nimble intellect but also often his humility in knowing that he was unable to specify all aspects of Christian mystery. In his own times and even now he is pressed to consistency by theologians of lesser imagination and suffocating systematic correctness when he best fits within post-modern interests in a plurality of readings (Norris 1994).

His approach both allowed him to study scripture with infinite care and press questions from his immediate context. While in Palestine at Caesarea he visited various places mentioned in the Bible and commented on their locations and their names. He corrected some manuscripts in his possession on the basis of his own observations. He rejected the literal reading of some verses because they did not speak of God in a proper manner, one he had learned not only from the Christian community but also from the developed and detailed criticism of Greek gods which he had gained from Greek philosophers as well as influences in his Egyptian milieu (Bostock 1975). In ways that make one think of a good mission contextualist, he found knowledge of God in many circles and formed his fullest conception from them. Christian revelation was always his centre, but he heard the Word speaking in many places. That ability helped him make scripture available to sophisticated readers, to the elite of his society, at the same time that it did not exclude either the Bible or the liturgy from those who could not read.

ORIGEN'S THEOLOGY

In his earliest work of theology, *Peri archôn*, Origen first laid out what must guide every Christian theologian: the rule of faith. His rule varies to some degree from that found in Tertullian's North Africa and in the missionary Irenaeus' home in Asia Minor or his adopted Gaul. Yet Christian theology had a unity in the midst of its considerable diversity, one to which Origen appealed (Blowers 1997).

Rufinus' translation of the rule (*Peri archôn* 1.4–8; Koetschau 1913; Görgemanns

and Karpp 1976; Crouzel and Simonetti 1978–84; Butterworth 1966) begins with God as the creator, both just and good, who was worshipped by all the ancient righteous ones of Israel, both patriarchs and prophets. That same God sent our Lord Jesus Christ to call first Israel and then, after their unbelief, the gentiles. He offered the Law, prophets and gospels. He is the apostle's God, that of both old and new covenants.

Christ Jesus was subordinate to the Father, spoken of either as begotten or created. He was present serving God at creation; all things were made through him. In these last days, he was made man, took on flesh although he remained God. Born of a virgin and the Holy Spirit, he truly suffered, died and was resurrected, lived for a while with his disciples and then was taken up.

The Holy Spirit shared honour and unity with the Father and the Son. Whether he was begotten or a Son of God, is open to investigation, but he is the one Spirit who inspired saints of the old and new covenants.

The human soul has its own life and substance. It will be held accountable for its actions and rewarded either in blessed life or eternal torment. There is a resurrection of the dead when the corruptible body will rise in glory. As a rational being the soul has free will and choice, for humans are not imprisoned in necessity.

The Devil and his angels are real, but exactly what they are and how they exist is not clearly explained. Most Christians, however, think Satan is a fallen angel who persuaded other angels to follow him. The world came into existence; it is not eternal and thus it will be dissolved. But what was before and what comes after this world is not set forth exactly in Christian teaching.

Scriptures are composed by the Spirit of God and have both obvious and hidden meanings.

The apostles delivered the above doctrine in the most simple expressions to the church. Yet they neither looked deeply into the grounds for all those statements nor restricted Christian theology to those beliefs. If the rule of faith determines the scope of scripture, its core, and the letter of scripture can save the simple, then speculation about many subjects only partially suggested by biblical verses may be entertained and developed. At the same time different views of what a particular passage meant or what it means in conjunction with other passages may be held in tension without final resolution.

The resulting theological richness of these views is extraordinary. They have proved quite threatening to many who did not enjoy the ambiguity and often settled the question of what Origen really taught by choosing the suggestion which to them seemed the most heretical. During his lifetime, however, Origen found many within the church who followed the rule of faith and accepted him. Invitations from all over the Mediterranean to preach, teach and serve in debates or discussions indicate that. At the same time he dealt with a series of Christian opponents whose views he contested. Among the simple believers whom he loved and tried to care for, sometimes in a condescending way yet often in a pastoral manner, were anthropomorphists. These folk read or heard scripture literally and thus were willing to insist that God had arms and legs. They also thought that a resurrection body would be the earthly body brought back to life without any sense of the transformation which the apostle Paul had stated (Armantage 1971: 397–414). Origen found both views

to be absurd, yet in spite of his anger with such interpretations, he could not bring himself to reject simple believers. They had a place in the church, although their views at times had to be rejected (McGuckin 1995). The letter of the Bible could kill, but it also could save. The church needed to believe, confess and teach the rule, study scripture attentively, and not insist on anthropomorphic readings of texts about God so that the intellectual elite of the Mediterranean would be forced out of its embrace.

If Origen did not want to alienate illiterate believers, he also did not want to succumb to the flights of fancy that he found propagated by certain intellectuals within the church. Modern historians have had great difficulty explaining exactly what Gnosticism was in the early third century (see Chapter 35 of this volume), but such teachings and the people who proposed them were influential. During Origen's lifetime or soon after, Greek philosophers like Plotinus and later Porphyry were attacking some gnostic ideas; thus we may infer that such views were not limited to Christian circles. They appeared within Hellenistic culture and, in mission terms, could easily have been seen as important bridges to educated people outside the church as well as those inside it. Discussions of evil, its relationship to divinity, the nature of the material and spiritual worlds, the purpose of human life now and hereafter marked many communities.

What are sometimes referred to as protognostic themes have been found within the New Testament, but it is not clear that actual gnostic groups with theologians who logically organized the teachings were functioning within Christianity that early. The attempt within Christian congregations to develop coherent patterns of gnostic thought seems to begin in earnest during the second half of the second century, but the extant texts from such teachers and their communities are notoriously fragmentary. Even the richness of the Nag Hammadi documents has only opened up questions about Gnosticism in dramatic new ways. Those proponents and their circles who are most in evidence as opponents of Origen are still not known thoroughly. If he is difficult to systematize, so are they. He is often represented in extracts of his thought chosen by those who take them out of context and use them to prove he is a heretic. Too often Origen's opponents have been treated similarly.

Three such groups stand out in Origen's Alexandrian and Caesarean contexts: followers of Basilides, Valentinus and Marcion. Modern interpreters do not consider Marcion (died *c.* 154) to have been primarily a gnostic. As best we can tell about a man from whom we have no full texts and whose views come to us from opponents who consider him a dangerous heretic, he did not involve himself in speculations about souls and worlds in the ways that many gnostics did. Born in Sinope in Pontus, the son of a rich shipbuilder, he evidently experienced some difficulty with Christian authorities there, went to Rome, studied with the gnostic, Cerdon, and eventually set up his own well-financed and well-organized church which spread throughout the Mediterranean basin and east of Antioch. What brought his work into the debates that concern Origen was his insistence that the creator-God who made the material world was evil. The God of the Old Testament was not to be worshipped because he was not good. Texts of what became the New Testament gospels had been thoroughly interpolated by Judaizers, which is what the apostles actually were. Only the Gospel of Luke, filtered on the basis of Paul's non-Judaizing

teachings, could be seen as providing a genuine portrait of Jesus (Harnack 1990; *Second Century* 1987–8). Origen indicates his rejection of Marcion's views directly (*Contra Celsum* 6.53 and 74 *inter alia*; Chadwick 1965; Borret 1967–9, 1976). His extensive allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament and his commentaries and homilies on the gospels indicate that he found the God of Hebrew and Christian scriptures to be the same, good deity. He dealt with difficult passages, not by assuming interpolations of the texts, but by insisting that problematic literal texts were there to alert the reader to the true allegorical meanings underneath.

Basilides, probably a Syrian who taught in Alexandria during the second quarter of the second century, more easily fits a common gnostic definition, but he also is represented to us only by his opponents. Apparently he was neither forced out of the Christian community in Alexandria nor did he choose to leave it. If he had a fully developed system, it is not retrievable from our sources. According to the myths spelled out in contradictory details by his enemies, Irenaeus (*Adversus Haereses* [*Against All Heresies*] 1.24; Roberts and Rambaut 1951; Rousseau *et al.* 1965–82) and Hippolytus (*The Refutation of All Heresies* 7.20–7 [7–15]; Nautin 1949; MacMahon 1951) he taught that the God of the Jews was a lower archon, responsible for much of the misery in creation, an autocrat who needed teaching. The high God, who is totally transcendent and can only be described by negative comments concerning what he is not, attempted to free humans. He sent his *nous* in Jesus Christ who delivered the knowledge necessary to get through the many levels of reality to the final abode of the supreme God. The Christ only appeared to have a material body. He did not suffer on the cross; Simon of Cyrene was crucified. The limited humanity of Christ allowed him to communicate with human souls but not be imprisoned in evil flesh. Some suggested that Basilides could count as many as 365 heavens through which a soul, freed from its material body, had to pass in order to reach home. Like Marcion, Basilides was deeply concerned with Christian scripture. One of his writings, no longer extant, carried the title *Exegetica*. What some consider to be genuine fragments of his work indicate that he knew a few of the Pauline epistles, Matthew, and perhaps wrote commentary on 1 Peter 4. Although Origen did speculate about souls before and after this life, he neither rejected the God of the Old Testament nor made him responsible for the imprisonment of souls in evil bodies.

Valentinus (fl. 120–60), born in Egypt and educated in Alexandria, evidently taught in Rome beginning perhaps as early as 136; he left there in 160 and basically disappeared from view. For years he also was known primarily from descriptions of the early heresiologists, but the *Evangelium Veritatis* (*Gospel of Truth*; MacRae 1977) may actually be a writing from him. It certainly represents his school. The other quotations of him, however, come from epistles and sermons; neither they nor the *Evangelium Veritatis* give us a deep sense of what his system may have been like, if indeed it was a system. Irenaeus claims it was (*Against All Heresies* 1.1; 2.14; Rousseau *et al.* 1965–82; Roberts and Rambaut 1951). The myth seems to be similar to that found in the Sethian *Apocryphon of John* (Waldstein and Wisse 1995) and aspects of *Eugnostos* (Parrott 1991), both adjusted to Valentinus' own thinking. There is no way to be certain whether Valentinus belonged to a larger group of Christians in Alexandria who were deeply interested in gnostic themes or whether

he was first persuaded by various gnostics and then added Christian elements to their teachings.

What we can glean from Irenaeus' description of Valentinus in particular suggests Platonic features beginning with a differentiation between parallel worlds of ideas and phenomena. Many aeons, existing in pairs, had offspring. The God of the Old Testament, the lowest of those, created the material world. Salvation of humans was procured by the aeon Christ who united with the human Jesus at his baptism and brought the knowledge necessary for salvation. Those created as 'pneumatics' like the Valentinians would receive that gnosis and eventually become part of the pleroma. 'Catholics' were only made 'psychics', who through faith and works could enter a middle level but never the pleroma. Most of humankind were formed as 'hylics', content to be imprisoned in matter and thus doomed.

Valentinus also was an exegete of Christian scripture; evidence for his use of Matthew, John and Romans appears in various fragments. The *Evangelium Veritatis* speaks of the writings of God's church and seems to know Matthew, John, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, Hebrews, 1 John and Revelation (Trigg 1983; Pearson 1990). Heracleon (Brooke 1967), a Valentinian leader in Rome, evidently wrote a commentary on John, one to which Origen responded in his John commentary.

Valentinian teachings about the eternal generation of the Son, the Fall, ecclesiology and the Christian life were similar to those which Origen advocated (Scott 1992). We can rather easily imagine at what points Origen would have contested a Valentinian myth by remembering his sense of the rule of faith. He specifically says that Valentinians had changed the gospel. They were wrong to think people were damned or saved on the basis of how they were created; their speculations about circles in circles as well as their understanding that wisdom should be represented as a virgin named Prunicus made no sense (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 2.27; 5.61; 6.34–5; Borret 1967–9, 1976; Chadwick 1965).

Not all of the opponents to whom Origen responded were those from within the broadest definition of the Christian community. Celsus, an intelligent proponent of what he considered to be traditional Graeco-Roman religion, had died before Origen was born. His *Alethês logos* (*On True Doctrine*; Hoffman 1987) was seen as being an important attack on Christianity, one which Origen's patron Ambrose thought was worth answering. Modern historians have debated who this Celsus was: a friend of Lucian of Samosata identified as an Epicurean and opponent of magic, or someone basically unknown from other texts. At present most view him as a Middle Platonist, seeing Origen as labelling him an Epicurean to make him an easier target. He had studied Christian texts, probably Genesis, Matthew, Luke and 1 Corinthians, and had talked or debated with many Christians including Marcionites and an almost endless collection of Christian Gnostics. His work appears to be the first systematic attack on Christianity from outside, at least the first still available in large part because Origen quoted much of the treatise in his *Contra Celsum* (*Against Celsus*; Chadwick 1965; Borret 1967–9, 1976). Although Celsus' effort may be called encyclopaedic, it turns around a series of points. Christians have rejected traditional religion, even their own precursors, the Jews, and thus are a real threat to societal cohesion. They see themselves as a separate nation. Emperors have been

correct to outlaw them. Their writings about their leader Jesus are inconsistent; they clearly indicate that they have been redacted many times in attempts to cover up his background as a deceiver and a sorcerer. His death shows he was not immortal. The teaching about resurrection is offensive nonsense. His deeds are no better, in some instances less good, than those of other religious leaders.

Christians themselves are low life: mostly slaves, trades people, women and children. They reject education of the intellect as the way to virtue. They have split into innumerable sects and thus present no unified sense of truth. Their god is evil, an unskilled creator who could not get it right the first time. He is not all powerful, indeed quite inferior to the impassible god of Greek philosophy. It is remarkably silly that these folk, who worship such a deity, can be so exclusive and tribal.

Origen's *Contra Celsum* (Borret 1967–9, 1976; Chadwick 1965) in particular and Gregory Thaumaturgus' *The Oration and Panegyric addressed to Origen* (*Eis Origenēs prosphônêtikos kai panēgurikos logos*) (Crouzel 1969; Salmon 1975; Slusser 1998), well indicate Origen's relationship to Greek philosophy. Although Origen early in his life had sold his library of Greek literature, when he turned his attention to teaching theology, to instructing students in the ascetic, mystical way of Christian life, he found it necessary to have them thoroughly study philosophers. Thaumaturgus tells us that he only excluded writers who denied either that God existed or that divine providence operated in the world. His students were required to read carefully and look for the features of that literature which could be pulled out and appropriated by Christians. As ancient Israel plundered Egypt of its treasures and built them into their liturgy, so intellectual Christians should make the riches of the Graeco-Roman and Egyptian heritages their own and use them for God, for misused riches they surely were (Origen, *Philocalia* 13.2; Harl 1983; Walls 1997). At first glimpse this approach, known as 'the despoliation of the Egyptians', seems a rapacious one; in some ways it is. But it has the distinct advantage that it expects to find truth in Egyptian and Hellenistic philosophy, religion and culture. It follows in the line of earlier apologists who argued vigorously for the ultimate wisdom of Christian revelation and rejected thoughts and practices they found wanting while at the same time they insisted that the entire cultural and religious heritage around them was not false. Origen and his students employed the methods of investigating texts which had been developed in the Greek schools. They studied grammar, rhetoric (Torjesen 1995), logic and dialectic, the natural sciences, geometry and astronomy as well as ethics and theology. For Origen such study had missionary purposes.

The eclectic borrowing from Greek philosophy is so intricate and pervasive that it can be seen rather clearly in a number of Origen's commentaries on scripture. Those works themselves resemble commentaries on Aristotle (Heine 1995). It is probably fair to think of Origen as a Middle Platonist, who gained much from the mystical, idealistic sides of the great Platonic heritage. His interest in logic suggests that despite his rejection of Aristotle's view of the eternity of the world, he made more use of Aristotle than some have thought (Pichler 1980). Origen certainly knew Stoic logic very well; aspects of its developments which are not represented directly in any extant Stoic writings or fragments may be gleaned from his work (Roberts 1971). He uses it unobtrusively in his commentaries (Heine 1993).

No list of opponents would be complete without mention of third-century

Judaism. Origen inherited a tradition of high regard for Philo from Clement of Alexandria (Runia 1992). Probably both in Alexandria and in Caesarea, Origen listened to Jewish rabbis concerning the Old Testament. It is quite likely that whatever facility he had in Hebrew came from the Jewish community. Yet at the same time that he depended upon them, he saw them as adversaries. Apparently Judaism had not ceased to be a missionary religion; it sought proselytes. And in many ways it remained one of the strongest antagonists. Origen knows about Christians who were swayed by Jewish ritual and practice, and indeed of Christians who converted (De Lange 1975; Blowers 1988). The intricate interweaving of his relationships with Jews is probably seen best, not only in his commentaries which indicate his discussions and debates, but also in his *Contra Celsum* where he responded to the construction by Celsus of a dialogue between a Christian and a Jew. There he contests both characterizations.

Working out from the rule of faith through opposition to Christian anthropomorphists and gnostics, traditional Egyptian and Greek religion, Hellenistic philosophy as well as Judaism we can see a deeper understanding of Origen's theology. The nature of God as incorporeal may not be as clear in scripture as it might be, but God is certainly immaterial. There are not two gods as the Marcionites insisted, one demiurge who was evil and created material things as gnostics taught. In a strange and unexpected way Origen took over the biblical insight of God suffering. There was reason to think of divinity as immutable, incorporeal, uncircumscribed, all the many adjectives that could be found in most descriptions which appear in Graeco-Roman and Egyptian religions. At the heart of Christian faith, however, is a suffering Father, one who could through certain aspects of his nature be above such things, yet because of his controlling love could be moved by the prayers and cries of those who sought him out. The pastoral concern of Origen himself, his attempt to be a spiritual director of consequence, both within his teaching and within his relationships with those around him, came from his grasp of God's own compassionate suffering. Celsus was wrong that God the Father sent his Son to suffer because he himself was not capable of suffering, was by nature above and beyond such material and lesser concerns. God was above and beyond, but by choice he was also nearby and within.

Christ Jesus was unclearly subordinate to the Father in Origen's thought. Prayer was not to be offered in the name of Jesus (Origen, *De oratione*; Koetschau 1899a; Greer 1979). The texts we have which deal with the questions of the Son's nature are not symphonic but dissonant (McGuckin 1987). Christ was there at creation, the one through whom everything was created, but he was also the first born of creation. The later careful distinctions between 'made' and 'begotten', which begin in the fourth-century Arian controversy and are most clearly stated by the Cappadocians, do not function in third-century debates. Yet even the Cappadocians are not always consistent in their efforts to distinguish the Greek *genêtos*, 'made', from *gennêtos*, 'begotten', as manuscripts of their works indicate (Norris 1991: 121, 135). Thus we can hardly be astonished that Origen does not have such precisely delineated features in his doctrine of Christ. He gives the Son honour and authority along with the Father and carefully involves the human soul in what later theologians would call the person of Jesus Christ (Williams 1975). Indeed we now know from Origen's

Dialogue with Heraclides (Origenous *dialektoi pros Hêrakteidan kai tous sun autô episkopous*; Scherer 1960; Daly 1992), discovered at Tura, south of Cairo in 1941, that he insisted on a human soul in Jesus for the sake of the Christian economy of salvation. 'What was not assumed was not saved' that stunning formula previously known to us from Gregory Nazianzen (*Epistle* 101; Browne and Swallow 1954; Galloway 1974) in his anti-Apollinarian correspondence of the later fourth century, had been bequeathed to the church by Origen nearly one hundred and fifty years earlier.

The Holy Spirit forms a part of Origen's rule of faith, but the sense of that Spirit in his theology is developed further. Certainly in the view of an exegete like Origen, the inspiration of scripture, the structuring of the texts with literal anomalies that alert the reader to deeper meanings, holds a primary place in the work of the Spirit. That Spirit has separate personal existence and thus may be spoken of as one of three in Trinity. But the reality both goes beyond the limits of human language in any age and does not yet reflect the technical terms that will be employed in particularly the fourth and fifth centuries.

The Spirit is deeply involved in the development of holiness through a life of disciplined virtue. Prayer and everyday living are unthinkable without the Spirit. Communion with, indeed union with, God depends on the work of the Spirit; full indwelling of the Holy Spirit reaches divinization although that goal is also related to the Father and the Son (Berthold 1992).

Origen's understanding of the soul and the body of each human becomes in many ways the focus of much of the controversy concerning his views. He posited pre-existent souls as a way to counter the determinism of astrology as well as the gnostic and Marcionite insistence that an evil demiurge was responsible for the horrors of the material world. Origen was a pastor at heart, one movingly grieved by the pressing problems he and people around him faced. If God was the great creator, both good and just, and there was no other who was responsible for such travesties as people experienced daily, what was a Christian theologian to say? The area of speculation, necessary not only for the intelligent, educated questioner but also the sorrowing, illiterate peasant, concerned both what came before and after the creation and the consummation of the world. If souls had existed before the world, if their lives in that existence were marked by their freedom and the consequent responsibility for their actions, then what happened in earthly lives could not be laid solely at the feet of God. He created souls and offered them choices. What they experienced in earthly life was a reward or punishment for their previous deeds.

In his understanding of the rule of Christian faith, this area had not been determined by the church; there was no consensus. The openness for such speculation was important because this was the arena in which he could bring scripture, worship and pastoral care to bear on the daily sadness of life. Even Origen's ideas about stars being alive and with souls, which drew on traditions in Greek philosophy and probably some of his gnostic opponents, focused on particular theological problems raised well outside the bounds of Hellenistic philosophy. He attacked Marcionites and others who demeaned God the Creator on the basis of his sense of theodicy and its relationship to the stars themselves. Their movement pointed not to astrological determinism but to the free and moral will of rational beings, not just humans but all who were led to respond to the unified divine law of God. Stars influenced the

natural order, not humans, because they themselves had sinned in their pre-existent forms and were thus doing penance in their reduced status (Scott 1991).

Origen flirted with the possibility of reincarnation when he speculated in his *Commentary on the Gospel according to John* (*eis to kata Ioannên euaggelion exêgêtikôn* 2.180–9; Preuschen 1903; Heine 1989) about who John the Baptist actually was, perhaps an angel, perhaps the Holy Spirit. He denied that the Baptist was the Holy Spirit in his *Homilies on Luke* (*Homiliae in Lucem* 4.4; Rauer 1959; Lienhard 1996) and in his *Commentary on Matthew's Gospel* (*eis to kata Mathaion euaggelion exêgêtikôn* 13.1–2; Klostermann 1933, 1935, 1941; Girod 1970) he vigorously rejected the transmigration of souls (Lienhard 1992). In words that pushed not only towards but into a doctrine of universal salvation, he insisted on the victorious love of God which in the end would overcome all. But in a letter quoted by his proponent Rufinus and his antagonist Jerome, he denied as totally absurd any suggestion that Satan himself ultimately would be saved (Jerome, *Apology against Rufinus* 42–4; Hritzen 1965; Laudet 1982; Rufinus, *De alteratione librorum Origenis* 10–13 [Dell' Era 1983]; Norris 1992).

The impression left in his developed hermeneutic does not sit well with all. The brilliant exegete from an early age was not particularly taken with the prowess of the masses within the church. He did not in any way want to put their salvation in jeopardy. Indeed as he says in his *Contra Celsum* (3.44–55), it is surely true that children and women, some hysterical, can be found within Christian congregations. Since God wanted to save all, they should be there, but they do not teach. Only his growing compassionate heart keeps him from being the type of theologian many church people still fear: haughty, dismissive, ruthless. It is in such light that his numerous readings of scriptural texts without making a final decision, his multiple interpretations of individual biblical passages and thus his sometimes convoluted theological musings, are to be understood. Theology should be imaginative; it should be open where the church has not closed it. But its primary structure lies in the rule of faith, stated literally in scripture for the salvation of the simple and not to be gainsaid by the intellectual as if it demanded the suicide of the mind.

It is fitting to end this chapter with a look at Origen's theology spelled out in his *On Prayer* (*Peri euchês*) and *On Martyrdom* (*Eis marturion protreptikos*), treatises written in Caesarea at the height of his career. The first (Koetschau 1899a; Greer 1979), extant in only one late Greek manuscript with no Latin translation, was known to those of the fourth and fifth centuries who debated Origen's orthodoxy. Three considerations may have been involved in the near catastrophe of losing this piece: first, Origen says that the Son is subordinate; prayer is not to be offered in Jesus' name. Other sentences suggest that all prayer is directed to God through Christ, but the ambiguity left Origen open to frontal attack. Second, there is an odd lack of practicality because the concerns of life in a material body appear at times to be irrelevant. Even praying for daily bread is turned into a request for supersubstantial food for the soul. Third, prayer is treated almost entirely as a private exercise. Its place in the liturgical life of a worshipping church is not emphasized.

Each of these aspects, however, has its own strength. First, Jesus prayed to God; the Son did not demand a place greater than that of the Father. Second, surely the deepest Christian prayer deals daily with more than bread. And the Greek word

epiousios is not a normal usage for 'daily' as Origen insisted and modern lexicographers agree (Bauer 1979: 296–7). Third, a man who preached regularly, perhaps daily, who worked so diligently within the church of his age and looked forward to its consummation, cannot be faulted as an individualist (Crouzel 1984: 219–66). He here wants prayer to be so much a part of each person's life that it marks those times outside worship together.

The work has considerable merit. The transcendence of God which is basic to his sense of worship receives a prominent place. Prayer in response to grace is the attitude in which reason begins to think clearly about the possibility of knowing impossibilities (Junod 1980). It may be offered to God through the Spirit when we do not know how to word our requests. Four types of prayer are distinguished: adoration, petition, entreaty and thanksgiving, each addressed to God. The last three might be addressed to deceased saints, but adoration can only be expressed to God the Father, not even the Son.

Praying without ceasing is a difficulty, but also a key to how all of life must be a prayer. Directions for prayer at least three times a day, standing and facing east, provide a disciplined routine in which rather oddly for one who does not always find the body a helper, its position in prayer can be of assistance. The growth of the soul occurs not only in deep contemplative prayer but also in practised virtue following Christ (Crouzel 1984: 97–8). The rather discursive commentary on the Lord's Prayer shows both the scholar comparing the texts of Matthew and Luke and the pastor reaching out through scripture to every Christian seeking God's will.

The mature theologian who as a youth wanted to follow his father into a martyr's death now reflected on the theme again in his *Exhortation to Martyrdom* (*Eis marturion protreptikos*; Koetschau 1899a; Greer 1979). His experience had been like that of all other Christians in his era: periods of peace punctuated with times of persecution. The occasion of this rather hurried writing, however, was a request from his patron Ambrose and one named Protocletus, both of whom faced the possibility of persecution.

As a pastor and son of a martyr Origen knows the pain and fear involved in the government's demand to sacrifice in worship to the emperor. But idolatry and apostasy represent a severe danger to the soul and the person's loved ones. God, the angels and the demons are among the spectators at the martyr's contest. Staying faithful to God in one's inner heart while making the required public sacrifice only strengthens the demons. At all costs each person must face persecution squarely and trust that standing fast through death is the greatest achievement possible in human life, the surest way to union with God and helpfulness to others. Sins committed after baptism, both those of the persecuted one and those who pray to that one, can be forgiven through faithful suffering unto death. The path of martyrdom leads to the throne of God where one not only lives in eternal blessedness but one also can hear the prayers of people on earth. Christian honour given to the martyrs, praying to them, is appropriate.

Origen was forced to consider his own advice. He closed his life as a martyr, both accepting the torment of persecution and calling others to hold fast. Whatever one thinks about his theological speculations, his intellectual imagination, moral activity and spiritual depth were crowned with martyrdom.

CONCLUSION

According to Eusebius (*H. E.* 6.39), Origen was brutally tortured for a man of his age. He thus imitated his Christ, followed his earthly father and wrote encouragement to the community in which he lived and served. Later theologians have always been able to find aspects of his life and theology to be less than they demand. But the positive contribution of this ascetic, exegete, mystic, mission theologian and spiritual director, with all its deficiencies, towers over that of nearly all others.

The development of mystical theology in the Cappadocians, in Maximus the Confessor (Blowers 1992), in a number of orthodox stalwarts of later ages, is impossible to understand without the gifts which Origen gave. Erasmus, now recognized as a theologian of consequence, is inexplicable without his dependence on Origen, the exegete and theologian (Godin 1982). Even in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, figures from different traditions, particularly Roman Catholics, have relied on him for positive themes as well as treating him as a repulsive abrasive who polished them. Crouzel (1984), Daniélou (1959) and De Lubac (1998) in their lives and their scholarship were deeply formed by their encounter with Origen. Balthasar (1984), the only twentieth-century theologian who may surpass Barth, had both heart and head shaped by Origen. Even R. P. C. Hanson (1959), who saw in Origen the precursor of the despised Bultmann, used this father of the church as a template for important contemporary discussion. Andrew Walls, the dean of mission historians, points out that Origen was the first professor of mission studies, the model for remaking missiology for the twenty-first century (Walls 1999). Whatever form ecumenical theology takes in the twenty-first century, it will be better if it can wrestle from Origen the way, the truth and the life which he sought and embodied.

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TERTULLIAN



David Wright

TERTULLIAN'S LIFE AND ACHIEVEMENT

For a writer who was one of the chief creators of the tradition of western Latin Christianity, we know disappointingly little about the life of Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus. No contemporary mentions him, not even Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage in the mid-third century, whose indebtedness to some of his works is obvious and who (so Jerome recorded) read him every day. He flourished between about 190 and 220, but the years of his birth and death are unknown. Jerome, in his *Who Was Who* of early Christian writers, composed in 392/3, could report merely that 'he is said to have lived to a decrepit old age' (*Famous Men* [*De viris illustribus*] 53; Barnes 1985: 3–29, 323–5).

Even some of the meagre biodata Jerome's entry provides have been called into serious doubt by modern scholars. That Tertullian was a presbyter of the Catholic church and the son of an officer in the Roman army (a 'proconsular centurion') is most improbable. His identification with a little-known Roman jurist of the same period and the same name cannot be sustained, and with it wavers also the widespread view that our Tertullian was trained as a lawyer and practised at the bar, perhaps in Rome. No firm evidence places him in Rome at all, or for that matter anywhere outside Carthage. This city (see Figure 40.1) had been founded in the ninth or eighth centuries BCE by settlers from Tyre in Phoenicia (hence the epithet 'Punic' used in relation to it), had grown to great power under rulers like Hannibal (247–183/2 BCE), had been sacked by the Romans (146 BCE) and then recolonized by Augustus, to become the capital of Africa Proconsularis. By the second century CE Carthage had become the second city only to Rome in the western Mediterranean.

It is in well-educated circles in Carthage that Tertullian most securely belongs, although Carthage cannot with certainty be assumed to have been his place of birth.¹ His youthful years as a pagan seem not to have been exceptional, though marked by a love for the amphitheatre and some sensual misdemeanours. When and through what influences he became a Christian can be ascertained, if at all, only by tempting but unsafe deductions from his writings. Perhaps he was impressed by the efficacy of Christian exorcisms, or deeply moved by the steadfastness of Christian martyrs –



Figure 40.1 Remains of Punic Carthage. Photo A. N. S. Lane.

perhaps even the group of Scillitans put to death at Carthage on 17 July 180. As a Christian writer Tertullian advocated the sharpest of demarcations between paganism and Christianity, and much of his literary work was devoted to shaming Christians into emulating this in their personal behaviour and social relations. As he put it in one of his many eminently quotable utterances (invariably more lapidary in his Latin), ‘Change, not birth, makes people Christians’ (fiunt non nascuntur Christiani: *Apology* 18.4 – modelled on a Stoic saying).² Everything suggests that Tertullian himself ‘became’ a twice-born Christian.

The two books *To My Wife* reveal him married to a Christian. The first urges her not to remarry if he dies first; the second, written after some interval for reconsideration, to make sure to marry a Christian if she has to remarry. (His second thoughts indicate a lack of eligible men in the Christian community in Carthage.) What is not known is whether marriage followed his conversion; his wife may have accompanied or followed him out of paganism. Women and marriage were subjects that preoccupied the Christian Tertullian both before and after his espousal of the New Prophecy – Montanism, as it is known to modern discussion.

Champion of New Prophecy

It was probably around 208 that Tertullian became the most distinguished champion of the adventist prophetic renewal that began a generation or more earlier with the preaching of Montanus in Phrygia. An impressive – but not unchallenged – consensus of recent scholarship no longer believes that Tertullian the Montanist left,



Figure 40.2 Early Christian symbols from Carthage in the Carthage Museum. Photo A. N. S. Lane.

or was expelled from, the catholic church.³ Even less did he subsequently abandon the Montanist assembly of Carthage to start his own even more exclusive sect of ‘Tertullianists’. These were later known to Augustine (*Heresies* [*De haeresibus*] 86), but were probably simply the remnants of African Montanism. But the writings of Tertullian’s Montanist years – the last 10–15 years of his active life – became increasingly harsh in their criticism of the compromises of catholic churchmen. Functioning partly as an *ecclesiola in ecclesia* (‘a little church within a church’) and no doubt increasingly marginalized, Tertullian and his fellow New Prophetists stridently promoted an escalation of the ethical and disciplinary demands of Christianity, as taught by the Paraclete (the Montanists’ favoured designation of the Holy Spirit, highlighting the role assigned him in John 14–16) in the latter days through prophetic oracles. In aspiration a force for renewal and reform, they must have been increasingly resented as the awkward squad. No wonder Tertullian was never canonized, even if he was never formally condemned or excommunicated.

Tertullian’s adoption of the New Prophecy in mid-career should not be read as marking a significant change of direction in his religious and theological orientation. It simply drove him further along the trajectory of total Christianity which appears to have characterized the church in Roman North Africa for most of its history. Not for nothing did this church first burst into view with the martyrdom of the Scillitans in 180. Although its earliest roots in Carthaginian society remain hotly contested, more than one aspect of Tertullianic Christianity may well reflect the residual influence of the grim child-sacrificing Punic religion of pre-Roman Carthage (Stager and Wolff 1984; Brown 1991; Leglay 1966: 486ff.). The daring blood imagery of the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (203) is all of a piece with a religious ethos which so exalted martyrdom that Tertullian can even surmise that God covets human blood (*Antidote to the Scorpion’s Sting* [*Scorpiace*] 6.11; Musurillo 1972: 106–31). Only one or two scholars still credit Tertullian with compiling the *Passion*, but its prologue and epilogue attest the kind of proto-Montanist spirituality which could well have predisposed Tertullian to embrace the New Prophecy. These

editorial sections of the *Passion* evince a vivid sense of the immediacy of the power of the Spirit in the present day, accomplishing greater works than in the past. This Carthaginian Christianity dealt in austere heroics; it was no haven for wimps and softies.

Pioneer of Christian Latin

The *Passion of Perpetua* is uniquely valuable in its contemporary witness to the Christian community of Carthage in Tertullian's lifetime. For apart from the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* (Musurillo 1972: 86–9), which are highly informative despite their documentary brevity, hardly any sources earlier than Tertullian's corpus survive from the Christian church of Roman North Africa. The *Acts* attest the existence of some Latin translations of Paul's letters and probably the Gospels, and some of the Apostolic Fathers were by now available in Latin, but to all intents and purposes Christian literature in Latin begins with Tertullian. Nearly all writers now agree that the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix is dependent on Tertullian and not vice versa, and the attempt of Jean Daniélou in particular to place a handful of Pseudo-Cyprianic treatises in late second-century Africa has not prevailed against post-Tertullian datings.⁴ Hence the truly enormous importance of Tertullian's Latin works.

The ones he wrote in Greek have not survived. That Greek was the first language of some Christians in Carthage is evident from the *Passion of Perpetua*. Indeed, one of the sources the *Passion* incorporates, Saturus' account of his vision, was probably originally composed in Greek. The subjects of Tertullian's lost Greek works, such as baptism, the veiling of virgins and a dissuasive against attending public entertainments, suggest that they served a catechetical purpose in Carthage – and point to his serving the Christian community as teacher rather than presbyter. At the same time, their failure to survive supports the conclusion that very soon Latin was the sole language of Christians of Carthage. Greek would remain the public tongue of Roman Christianity for decades to come. Carthage was the cradle of Latin-speaking Christianity, and Tertullian was both parent and midwife. It was his unequalled achievement to translate – both literally and in the metaphorical missiological sense – an almost exclusively Graecophone religion into a vigorous, colourful and long-lasting Latinity.

We should not imagine that Tertullian started completely from scratch. The spoken Latin of Christian worship and conversation and Latin scriptures provided some basic vocabulary. How far the synagogue had already Latinized the Jewish Bible, whether direct from Hebrew or through the Greek Septuagint, cannot easily be determined; the Jewish community in Carthage probably did not go back beyond the second century. Yet none of these factors detracts from Tertullian's accomplishment in being the first to make Jesus Christ speak Latin.

Many terms could, of course, be transliterated straight from Greek into Latin, like baptism, eucharist and church (*ecclesia*). In some cases this was done after an alternative had been tried and found wanting; Tertullian settled for the verb *baptizo* after trying out *tingo*, 'dip'. In other instances, a new career was created for a Latin word, such as *sacramentum* (instead of a transliteration of the Greek *mysterion*). It was especially in the field of Christological and Trinitarian doctrine that Tertullian's



Figure 40.3 An early Christian basilica in Carthage. Photo A. N. S. Lane.

linguistic creativity was most influential, with the coining of *Trinitas* and the enlistment of *persona* and *substantia* into the technical vocabulary of future debate and definition. Hundreds of Latin neologisms appear in Tertullian's writings, but by no means all can confidently be credited to him. Nevertheless it is beyond question that across a wide range of subject-matters Tertullian successfully, even brilliantly, pioneered the cultured Latinization of Christian discourse (Braun 1977).

In one particular area he is frequently indicted for muddying the stream of Latin theology at its source. He certainly used a range of terms which also were at home in the law-courts, such as merit, satisfaction (making good breaches of the law by compensatory acts) and guilt (*culpa*, *reatus*). A standing charge faults him for importing a legalistic strain into western Christian thought, especially in relation to atonement, reward and punishment. There is probably still some truth in this allegation, even when its undergirding assumption of Tertullian's legal formation is dismantled. The legal colouring of his writing has often been exaggerated by failure to examine his actual use of terms which elsewhere have technical judicial force. He frequently turns the language and concepts of the jurists to non-specialized purposes, in a manner at times incongruous with a supposed professional training in law.

Rhetorician of revelation

Whereas earlier writers on Tertullian commonly cast him as a lawyer only imperfectly Christianized (a portrayal that still persists in some systematic theo-

logical circles), present-day scholars find in him the consummate rhetorician. Some of the features traditionally ascribed to his legal background are readily understood in terms of his expertise in the ways of rhetoric. This emphasis in turn is part of an enhanced appreciation of his assimilation of classical culture in the cause of Christian argument. This approach to Tertullian sees him as the product of a scholastic environment in Carthage which 'could have provided all the learning that was good for a man' (Barnes 1985: 194 and *passim*). His classical erudition was wide-ranging, and in the case of some authors, such as Plato, ran deep. In respect of rhetorical technique, he exemplifies the elaborateness of the Second Sophistic movement, which loved to parade its learning and to trade in philosophical themes. Tertullian deployed its skills in the service of theology, but in a style that all too often gives the impression that everything is subordinate to oratory (Sider 1972).

One crucial importance of reading Tertullian's intellect predominantly in literary and rhetorical categories is that it gives the lie to a disgracefully common misrepresentation of him as not only anti-philosophical but even as anti-intellectual and an enemy of reason. His name has come to stand for one of the stock positions in the age-old debate between faith and reason. The warrant for his classification as a thoroughgoing fideist is found in two of his famous – or notorious – dicta yanked from their contexts in his arguments. 'I believe it is absurd' (*credo quia absurdum*) turns out to be a distorted version of some words from Tertullian's refutation, rich in irony, of Marcion's docetic denial of the sufferings of the Son of God (Décarie 1961; Osborn 1997: 48–64). Taking his cue from the depiction of the crucifixion by St Paul (a great authority with the Marcionites) as folly to the Greeks (1 Cor. 1–2), Tertullian arrives at a criterion of what is worthy of belief – namely, its foolishness. He plays also on the saying of Jesus in Matt. 10:33 (and parallels), 'Whoever is ashamed of me, of him will I be ashamed', and drives to a resolution:

The Son of God was crucified; I am not ashamed because others must be ashamed of it. And the Son of God died; it is believable because it is foolish (*ineptum*). And after burial he rose again; it is certain because it is impossible.

(*The Flesh of Christ* [*De carne Christi*] 5.4)

A wooden citation in isolation of one clause which is then misquoted misses out on everything that is Tertullianic in this passage: its biblical seriousness, its rhetorical virtuosity, its teasing glorying in the paradoxical, which here means that he demonstrates the believability of what Marcion denies on grounds that Marcion himself advances in denial!

Even better known is 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?' – the type of question that English grammar recognizes as 'rhetorical'; that is, designed not to elicit information but to make an impression. In context it is the first of three: What then has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What the Academy to do with the church? What heretics with Christians? (*Prescriptions against Heretics* [*De praescriptione haereticorum*] 7.9). The clue to interpretation is evident in the first member in the third question, not 'philosophers' (as the parallelism leads us to expect) but 'heretics'. The passage is part of Tertullian's complaint against the philosophical corruptions of the Christian revelation perpetrated by the different heretical sects. It belongs to an argument for the integrity of the revealed faith of Christians, for Tertullian is indeed

pre-eminently a theologian of revelation and an opponent of all *curiositas* beyond the church's rule of faith. He is not making an absolute pronouncement outlawing all philosophy from Christian interest. If this were the nuance conveyed by 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?', then 'Almost every word he wrote gave the lie to the answer he implies' (Barnes 1985: 210; see Osborn 1997: 27–47).

The Prescription(s) of Heretics is the traditional English rendering but singularly unhelpful. The Latin *praescriptio* has normally been understood of a courtroom procedure: Tertullian 'applies for an injunction to restrain any heretic from trespassing upon holy scripture' (Barnes 1985: 64). The treatise refuses to enter into debate with heretics on the basis of scripture because as the possession of the church they have no right to its use. But a wider examination of the occurrences of the noun and its cognate verb in Tertullian's writings, including this one, discloses that its basic meaning is logical, demonstrative, dialectical, with no more than a legal tint. Indeed it is deployed with a range of meanings according to its context – principle, objection in principle, proof, argument, definition – one kind or other of dialectical procedure (Fredouille 1972: 195–234). This shift in interpretation is a handy illustration of the move away from reading Tertullian in the categories of Roman law. Manuscript evidence may be cited in favour of the plural, *praescriptiones*, in the title, together with 'against all heresies'. The result accords neatly with Tertullian's own concluding summary of what the treatise has accomplished:

We have now taken up a general position against all heresies, that on definite, just and necessary objections in principle (*praescriptionibus*) they must be debarred from discussion of the scriptures.

(*Prescriptions* 44.13)

ANTI-HERETICAL WRITINGS

In *The Prescriptions*, written around 200, Tertullian finally promises separate treatises against individual heresies. These constitute one of the three main groupings into which we can divide his thirty odd-writings.⁵ *Prescriptions* was followed by *Against Hermogenes*, a gnostic in Carthage indebted to Middle Platonism and Stoicism, against whose teaching Tertullian defended the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*; *The Flesh of Christ* and *The Resurrection of the Dead*, linked by their rejection of the docetic views of gnostics and Marcionites; *Against the Valentinians*, one of the main varieties of Gnosticism, whose adherents' differences Tertullian plays off against each other in a brief discussion offered as a trailer for a full-scale engagement; and *Antidote to the Scorpion's Sting* (Latin *Scorpiace*), a vindication of martyrdom against gnostic objections by a demonstration on biblical grounds that it was ordained by God.

Tertullian's highly important work on *Baptism*, the first Christian treatment of the subject, was occasioned by polemic against the rite by a woman of the Cainite gnostic heresy, and so may be included in this group of his writings. It is abundantly informative on African liturgical practices, shares in the concreteness that characterizes so much of Tertullian's thought by its eulogy of water and displays already that preoccupation with purification before baptism which would prove so distorting to

western baptismal usage. It also counsels against the baptism of babies – thereby providing the earliest unambiguous reference to the practice and sparking off still unfinished debate whether it or his objection to it was the real innovation.

The soul and the Trinity

Tertullian's anti-heretical corpus includes three of his weightiest works. *The Soul*, almost his longest, picks up the theme of a lost treatise against Hermogenes on *The Origin of the Soul* (*De censu animae*).⁶ It is directed against philosophical and philosophically inspired gnostic errors on the origin and nature of the soul, rejecting Platonic views in favour of an explicitly Stoic understanding of the soul's spiritual essence as material substance. (Tertullian believed the same about the spiritual being of God.) Platonic pre-existence of souls is also refuted as Tertullian opts for traducianism, according to which body and soul alike come into existence simultaneously at conception (which helps to explain Tertullian's rejection of abortion, in accord with early Christianity as a whole). Pythagorean transmigration is also discounted, in a work which illustrates Tertullian's classical learning to great effect – but can also appeal to Perpetua's vision of paradise and to a vision of 'a soul in a bodily shape, . . . offering itself even to be grasped by the hand . . . and in form resembling that of a human being in every respect' reported by a prophetically gifted sister as received during Sunday worship at Carthage (*The Soul* [*De anima*] 9.4). Dreams are also considered at some length, and ecstasy too – which whets our appetite in vain for his lost work on this subject.

It is one of the paradoxes of Tertullian's career that it was during his Montanist years that he produced his greatest refutations of heresy. 'Praxeas did a twofold service for the devil at Rome: he drove away prophecy and introduced heresy; he put to flight the Paraclete and crucified the Father' (*Against Praxeas* [*Adversus Praxean*] 1.5). Praxeas is otherwise unattested, and may be Tertullian's pseudonym, 'busy-body', for some better-known Asian teacher who both opposed Montanism and propagated monarchianism, that early and influential but facile resolution of the difficulties of conceiving the Trinity by representing Father, Son and Spirit as impermanent modes of activity of the single undifferentiated God. *Against Praxeas* is by common consent one of Tertullian's most original and influential writings. By laying so mature a foundation for the doctrine of the Trinity, he secured the West against the decades of controversy suffered later in the East over Arius and his successors. His contribution consisted above all in furnishing Latin theology with a technical Trinitarian vocabulary, with his innovative use of *Trinitas*, *substantia* and *persona* in particular. Threeness and oneness are equally safeguarded in a series of quasi-definitions whose economic Latin defies translation with similarly lucid brevity in English. But if the formulae proved durable, the content Tertullian conveyed by them still at one major point betrayed the limiting legacy of the subordinationism of second-century Logos theology. Tertullian conceived of the eternal Wisdom of God being sent forth as Word (Logos) and generated as Son in stages in the course of the divine 'economy' in creation, revelation and redemption. When he talks of 'the sacrament of the economy which distributes the unity into Trinity, setting forth Father, Son

and Spirit as three' (*Against Praxeas* 2.4), he reminds us that theological genius always remains a creature of its time.

Intense discussion has enveloped a number of the terms Tertullian uses in his Trinitarian expositions, such as *substantia*, *persona*, *gradus*, *census*, *status*, *forma*, *species*. A legal background has been claimed for several of them, or again a philosophical one, but it is no less possible that Tertullian took some of them from everyday speech. As such, they were well sourced to serve the distinctive thrust of his theological mind, which Daniélou characterizes as:

making every effort to place concrete data in relationship to one another. He is essentially realistic in his thinking . . . First, there is its descriptive, experiential, concrete quality; it sets out to make an inventory of reality. Second, there is the urge to discriminate, to arrange, to put everything in its proper place. In this respect Tertullian's work . . . is the product of a . . . typically Latin spirit.⁷

Marcion posed a far greater threat to second- and third-century catholic Christianity than Praxeas. By far the longest of Tertullian's works was *Against Marcion*, in five books as we now have it in its third edition (as Tertullian informs readers at the outset). The stages of its textual development are still subject to scholarly refinement. Its value for our knowledge of Marcionism is enhanced by the failure of several other writers' refutations to survive. The five books deal in succession with Marcion's dualism of two Gods, the identity of the creator of the world with the Father of Jesus, Marcion's Christology, and in turn his gospel text and his Apostolikon. From Book 4 onwards, Tertullian drew upon Marcion's *Antitheses* between the writings of old and new covenants. Books 4 and 5 carry special interest for the textual history of parts of the New Testament, but from Book 2 onwards much of the work consists of biblical documentation of his case. The kernel is found in the initial overthrow of Marcion's dualistic theology. What follows, in its relentless rhetorically barbed dissolution of Marcionite positions, attests the seriousness with which Tertullian took his challenge – as well as that addiction to the total demolition of opposing cases which provided such scope for the display of his argumentative genius.

APOLOGETIC WRITINGS

To the Nations

Tertullian was combative by nature, so that the second genre into which his writings fall, apologetic, shows him in his element. Most of these works were produced in his early years as a writer, in the later 190s. First came *To the Nations* (*Ad nationes*), generally regarded as unfinished and unrevised and perhaps never intended, for publication. The *Apology* (*Apologeticum*) would soon cover much the same ground, but far more skilfully and to much greater effect. *To the Nations* may even be viewed as a collection of materials, or in part a first draft, for the *Apology*. It is in the tradition of earlier Greek apologies, on some of which it probably drew, particularly in Book 1, in arguing that Christians were tried under unjust procedures and in ignorance of

what they stood for, and in refuting the common allegations of cannibalism, incest and the like. Book 2 moved from defence to attack. Tertullian deployed material from the Roman writer Varro to flesh out the argument that pagan gods were simply deified human beings.

Apology

The *Apology*, by contrast, is often judged Tertullian's masterpiece (meriting an early Greek translation). It is addressed to the governors of the imperial provinces and more precisely the magistrates of Carthage. The work's effectiveness resides partly in the immediacy and directness with which it depicts the experience of Christians in Carthaginian society, but much more in the brilliance of the argument which is still capable of leaving the reader applauding in admiration. In Tertullian's hands *apologia* shifts from the philosophical mode to the rhetorical and even juridical. Tertullian is the apologist as advocate, mingling defence with attack, pulling every rhetorical trick in the book, searching high and low in Christian and pagan sources and even Jewish for the building blocks of his case, which repeatedly by the device of *retorsio* casts back upon the heads of critics the very scandals and follies they fasten on Christians. It abounds in quotable paragraphs and phrases, revelling in irony, in *reductio ad absurdum*, in bathetic pricking of inflated pretentiousness, in breathtakingly sharp swings of mood and style. Christian readers (to whom most apologies are truly directed) would have been hugely enheartened by Tertullian's matchless confidence in the superiority of the Christian religion. In his intellectual vivacity, unflinching defiance and confidence in taking the battle onto enemy territory Tertullian must have been hailed as an invincible champion. His is the virtuosity not merely of dazzling oratory but also of conceptual brilliance, not least in the surprising connections he makes. The images of pagan deities are but human artefacts, produced by processes akin to the tortures inflicted on Christians:

It might be no small solace to us in all our punishments, suffering as we do because of these same gods, that in their manufacture they suffer as we do themselves. You put Christians on stakes and crosses: what image is not first formed from clay and then set on cross and stake? The body of your god is first consecrated on a gibbet. You tear the sides of Christians with your claws, but to every limb of your gods axes, planes and files are more vigorously applied. We lay our heads on the block; before lead, glue and nails are fetched your gods are headless . . . If this is how a deity is composed, then those who are punished are consecrated and tortures will have to be declared divinities!

(*Apology* 12.3–5)

Nor does the cruelty of the persecutors, however exquisite, achieve its ends. 'Instead it entices others to our school. The more you mow us down, the more we multiply. The blood of Christians is seed' (50.13).

To dispel slanderous gossip, Tertullian explains, soberly but movingly, how Christians conducted themselves in meeting for worship. It is one of our most valuable early descriptions:



Figure 40.4 The Roman amphitheatre in Carthage. Photo A. N. S. Lane.

We assemble together and form a congregation so that by united force we may capture God by our prayers. This is the violence God delights in . . . It is chiefly the quality of our love in action that brands a distinguishing mark upon us in some people's eyes. 'See how they love one another', they say – for they themselves hate one another. 'See how ready they are to die for each other' – for they are more ready to kill each other . . . One in mind and soul, we do not hesitate to share our earthly goods with one another. We have everything in common but our wives.

(*Apology* 39.2, 7, 11)

If persecutors really believe that Christians engage in cannibalistic feasting, 'then blood is a test that should be applied to identify Christians . . . Let them be proved by their appetite for human blood, just as they are by their refusal to sacrifice' (9.15).

Humanity and religious freedom

Among the profounder threads running through the *Apology* is the appeal to a common humanity. He exposes the absurd incongruity of the enormities alleged against Christians by inviting his readers to picture themselves, in order to gain eternal life, plunging the knife into an innocent baby, saturating their bread with its blood, noting where their mother and sister are sitting so that when the lights are doused they will know where to perpetrate incest. He imagines pagan readers recoiling at the very thought:

Why then can others do it, if you cannot? Why cannot you, if others can? I suppose we Christians are by nature aliens, grotesque monsters, with fangs like aliens and monstrous energies for incestuous lust! If you believe this of a human being, you too can do it. You are human, as a Christian is. If you cannot do it, you ought not to believe it. For a Christian is a human being no less than you.
(*Apology* 8.4–5)

There emerges in the *Apology* the lineaments of a fresh understanding of the state (Campenhausen 1964: 14, and the whole essay, 4–35). Tertullian moves beyond traditional protestations of Christian loyalty and traditional promises of Christian prayer for imperial welfare. He dares to establish the dignity of the emperor on an entirely new basis, by acknowledging in his office God's ordained authority over the nations. Only a true estimation of the emperor's humanity under God offers him due allegiance and respect. 'I might say that Caesar is more ours than yours, for our God has appointed him.' On this proper appreciation of the emperor's place depends the purchase on God that Christians alone gain by their prayers. And pray they will, for 'a large benevolence is enjoined upon us, even so far as to entreat God for our enemies and to beg for blessing on our persecutors' (*Apology* 33.1, 31.2).

Finally, among so much else that invites admiring précis and quotation, Tertullian enters a claim for freedom of religion. If, as the Romans' instincts and behaviour reveal, their gods are nothing but dead human beings deified, refusal to worship them cannot constitute irreligion. 'On the contrary, the taunt will redound on your own head: worshipping a lie, you are really guilty of the crime you charge against us, not merely by rejecting the true religion of the true God but by actually assaulting it' (*Apology* 24.2).

See whether this too may not contribute to the chargesheet of irreligion – removing religious liberty and forbidding free choice of deity, so that I am not allowed to worship whom I will but am forced to worship whom I would not. No one, not even a human being, wants to be worshipped unwillingly . . . Every province and every city has its own god . . . We alone are debarred from our chosen religion. We injure the Romans, we are not reckoned as Romans, because we do not worship the Romans' god. It is well that God belongs to all, and all we to him, whether we will or no. But with you it is lawful to worship anything you wish apart from the true God, as though he was not rather the God of all to whom we all belong.

(*Apology* 24.6, 8, 9–10)

Yet a tone of sober realism pervades the *Apology*. If Christians (who are but of yesterday) now fill every place of public resort and have left the pagans nothing but the temples, Tertullian still regards affairs of state as utterly foreign to them. It was inconceivable that a Christian would aspire to be emperor. He slips instinctively into saying 'Roman' when he means 'non-Christian'. A world-renouncing quietism breaks through: 'Only one thing in this life greatly concerns us, and that is to get quickly out of it' (41.5). And so the work ends on a note of gratitude for the opportunity of gaining full forgiveness by the blood of martyrdom. 'As divine and human reckonings clash, when we are condemned by you, we are absolved by God' (50.16).

Other apologetic works

The *Testimony of the Soul* (*De testimonio animae*) is as brief and precisely focused as the *Apology* is expansive and ambitious. It picks up a paragraph in *Apology* 17.4–6, which, in support of the truth of the one God, cites ‘the witness of the soul that by its very nature is Christian’ (*testimonium animae naturaliter Christianae*). Eschewing earlier apologists’ reliance on the philosophers, Tertullian summons a new witness – the human soul, the soul of common folk, unspoilt by education, which instinctively gives voice to a natural awareness of God in its unguarded cries, ‘Good God!’, ‘God will repay me’, ‘God bless you’. The soul is of course not Christian (for no one is born a Christian), which makes its testimony the more valuable – ‘as simple as it is true, as popular as it is simple, as universal as popular, as natural as universal, as divine as it is natural’ (*Testimony* 5.1). The argument, which depends on a commonplace of Hellenistic, especially Stoic, philosophy, is as enchanting as today it is unconvincing, but it is still perhaps Tertullian’s most charming book.

To Scapula (*Ad Scapulam*) is addressed to the African governor of that name who took to persecuting Christians. Written in 212, and possibly the author’s last extant treatise, it strikes a menacing note, referring to a recent total eclipse as a warning of divine retribution. Scapula will not succeed, for the Christian community thrives on persecution. If Scapula persists, he might find his door thronged by many thousands of Carthaginians of every sex, age and rank, all eager for martyrdom. Although much here recalls the *Apology*, the more strident tone bespeaks the zeal of a Montanist.

Notably unsuccessful is Tertullian’s *Against the Jews*, certainly left unfinished and of doubtful authenticity for some scholars. It was occasioned by an argument between a Christian and a Jewish proselyte, which may have involved Tertullian himself, but the contents of the book are largely traditional. It provides little evidence of close personal engagement with the Jewish community in Carthage on Tertullian’s part (Setzer 1997).

Finally, among his apologetic writings may be included his shortest and most enigmatic, *De pallio*. The *pallium* was the mantle or cloak characteristic of philosophers, and this is a defence of the abandonment, by Tertullian presumably, of the Roman toga for the *pallium*. The sole Christian element appears at the very end: ‘Rejoice, mantle, and exult! A better philosophy has dignified you since you began to clothe a Christian’ (6.2). In difficult Latin (even by Tertullian’s standards), clever but affected, *recherché* in its erudition, viewed variously as the earliest or latest of his works, if it is more than ‘a mere “jeu d’esprit” or literary curiosity’ what is its message? Perhaps it means that ‘a Christian can take his pagan intellectual inheritance with him into his new faith. The antithesis between Athens and Jerusalem . . . has been resolved’ (Barnes 1985: 230–1). Others have read it as a summons to Christians to be nonconformists in society, even ascetics. The toga had been a Roman import, ousting the earlier *pallium*, and was the attire of unsavoury characters and behaviours. But if Tertullian here calls for some form of Christian renunciation, he has chosen to cloak it in abstruseness.

MORAL AND DISCIPLINARY WRITINGS

De pallio might well have been included in the largest category of Tertullian's works, the moral and disciplinary. Among them are several others concerned with appropriate dress, as part of a larger concern for a proper correspondence between the inward and the outward. Here we observe Tertullian the instructor of the Christian people, predominantly concerned to foster distinctiveness and even separation, scornful of excuse and compromise, exhorting to martyrdom, tending towards asceticism, and, as he became a champion of the New Prophecy, explicitly escalating the standards expected of spiritual Christians in terms of what may be called a development of ethics (rather than of doctrine).

Examples of Tertullian's shift into a higher Montanist gear will introduce us to some of these fifteen or so writings. *Flight in Persecution* ([*De fuga in persecutione*]), commonly dated 212/13 disallows it. Nothing happens without God's will, and if persecution ensues, he intends us to suffer, for our good. Jesus' counsel 'Flee from city to city' (Matt. 10:23) was meant only for his original hearers. Responding repeatedly to objections to his hard line, Tertullian denies that God cherishes the weak – 'he always rejects them, teaching first that we must not flee from persecutors but rather must not fear them' (6.2). What looks like a prophetic oracle clinches it: 'Have no desire to die in bed, in miscarriage, in gentle fever, but in martyrdom, that the one who suffered for you may be glorified' (9.4). Those who have received the Paraclete have one who will speak for them and succour them in suffering.

Thus Tertullian annuls his approval of flight in earlier treatises on *Patience* and *To My Wife* (*Ad uxorem*). His attractive panegyric of patience (*De patientia*), composed near 200, displays Tertullian at his least contentious. Christ himself is its supreme exemplar. Patience bears with the inconveniences of flight (13.6). Writing to his wife, Tertullian is already more grudging: 'even in persecutions it is better with permission "to flee from city to city" than when arrested and tortured to deny the faith' (*To My Wife* 1.3.4). The Paraclete later improved his hermeneutics. So often in these works on Christian behaviour we glimpse debates within the church of Carthage, with scripture bandied to and fro.

Against remarriage

We have already noted the movement of Tertullian's interest between the two books *To My Wife*. The first is essentially a eulogy of celibacy, which widowhood gives a wife a golden second opportunity to grasp. The second insists that remarriage must always be 'in the Lord'. In enlarging on the problems of mixed marriages, Tertullian furnishes illuminating detail on Christian practice and domestic life in contemporary Carthage. The Christian wife

has by her side a servant of Satan who will act as an agent of his master in obstructing the performance of Christian duties and devotions. Thus, for example, if a fast day (*statio*) is to be kept, her husband will make an early appointment with her to go to the baths; if a fast is to be observed, her husband will, that very day, prepare a feast; if it be necessary to go out on an

errand of Christian charity, never are duties at home more urgent. Who, indeed, would permit his wife to go about the streets to the houses of strangers, calling at every hovel in town in order to visit the brethren? Who would be pleased to permit his wife to be taken from his side, when she is obliged to be present at evening devotions?

(*To My Wife* 2.4.1–2; trans. Le Saint 1951: 29)

There is much more to similar effect. The stern warning is necessary, for it is hard to find in the house of God unmarried men rich enough to keep wealthy Christian widows in the style to which they have been accustomed. 'Where but from the devil will they get husbands to maintain their sedans, their mules, the outlandishly tall slaves they need to dress their hair?' (*To My Wife* 2.8.3; Le Saint 1951: 34).

But whatever the obstacles in the way of finding a Christian spouse, such a second marriage possesses the beauty of all Christian marriage, which Tertullian movingly portrays in conclusion. Yet in one of his most blatantly Montanist works, *De monogamia*,⁸ Tertullian declares the remarriage of the widowed as heinous, as simultaneous bigamy. For the most part he constructs his case from scripture alone, but only after he has laid his cards on the table about the distinctive ministry of the Paraclete. The words of Jesus in John 16:12 show adequately 'that the Holy Spirit will reveal such things as may be considered innovations, since they were not revealed before, and burdensome, since it was for this reason that they were not revealed' (*Monogamy* 2.2; Le Saint 1951: 71). To exclude the possibility that such an argument might justify 'any oppressive obligation' as a new revelation of the Spirit, Tertullian sets up the criterion of the orthodoxy of the Spirit, i.e. the New Prophecy. An evil spirit first perverts the creed before perverting morality. If the prohibition of remarriage is truly new and burdensome, the Paraclete had sufficient grounds in the practice and teaching of Jesus and his apostles to have gone further and forbidden marriage altogether! The Paraclete may indeed be welcomed as our advocate, since he exempts our weakness from the demand of total continence. From this perspective 'it is no novelty the Paraclete reveals. What he foretold, he now fulfils; what he deferred, he now exacts' (*Monogamy* 3.9; Le Saint 1951: 76).

The Paraclete's stricter discipline

One can but admire the rhetorical skill of this Christian sophist. In other Montanist works Tertullian spells out the theoretical basis for the Paraclete's introducing a more stringent discipline, insisting all the time that the New Prophecy adheres unwaveringly to the doctrinal rule of faith. The writer who in the *Apology* made such play of pagan follies and contradictions, now revels in exposing similar absurdities in 'sensualist' catholics. The Montanists are accused not of theological error but of 'plainly teaching more frequent fasting than marrying' (*Fasting* [*De ieiunio*] 1.3). Such extended fasts and xerophagy (eating only dry food) attune a Christian to bear the life of prison and martyrdom, while catholics, ever a gullible prey to pseudo-martyrs (as the pagan journalist Lucian of Samosata reported so vividly), pamper their prisoners with every home comfort (the details are revealing of the possibilities

of mitigating prospective martyrs' hardships) and even drug them to face death unflinchingly.

The Veiling of Virgins (*De virginibus velandis*) similarly exacts a practice more stringent than Carthaginian custom. The precise difference need not concern us so much as the justification Tertullian presents at length.

While the rule of faith remains constant, other issues of discipline and conduct allow the novelty of correction, as the grace of God works and makes progress to the very end. How do we understand the work of God if, while the devil is ever working and adding daily to the ingenuities of wickedness, it has either ceased or stopped advancing? This was why the Lord sent the Paraclete, that since human mediocrity was unable to take in everything at once, little by little discipline should be straightened, ordered and carried on to perfection by the Holy Spirit acting in the place of the Lord . . . (John 14:12–13) . . . What then is the Paraclete's service function but this: straightening discipline, revealing Scripture, reforming the understanding, making progress towards better things? Nothing is without its stage of life, everything awaits its time.

(*Veiling* 1.4–5)

Tertullian proceeds to develop the image of growth from seed to fruit.

So too righteousness (for one and the same is the God of righteousness and of creation) was at first elementary, with a natural fear of God. From that stage it advanced through the law and the prophets to infancy, and thence through the gospel it burst into the ferment of youth. Now through the Paraclete it is settled into maturity.

(*Veiling* 1.7).

Thus Montanism received its most sophisticated formulation at the hands of the rigorist rhetorician of Carthage. On more than one count it was too daring for the catholic bishops. No more than church leadership in any age could they tolerate such a free-range Holy Spirit, and in any case, as the Christian community competed for breathing space in the Mediterranean world, accommodation was the order of the day. The granting of a second, and last, opportunity for repentance for grave lapses after baptism, was carefully hedged around in Tertullian's early work on *Repentance*. It includes a graphic account of the public prostration and humiliation entailed in this demanding 'confession' (Tertullian uses the Greek word *exomologêsis*): groaning, weeping and roaring to God and rolling before the presbyters' feet seem uncannily reminiscent of revivalist phenomena in every century.

But a book of his Montanist years, *De pudicitia*, a title which resists an obvious English translation – *Modesty*, *Purity*, *Chastity* are possibilities – lambasts an unnamed bishop who had the effrontery to decree, 'I remit the sins of adultery and fornication to those who have fulfilled repentance.' This 'supreme pontiff' and 'bishop of bishops' is now identified by most interpreters not as a Roman bishop but as a bishop of Carthage, most probably Agrippinus. *De pudicitia* denies that the church hierarchy has authority to forgive the capital sins of apostasy, fornication and murder to the baptized. The power of the keys was granted to Peter in a solely personal capacity as the first to be endued with the Spirit. Thereafter it resides only

with the similarly Spirit-endowed who constitute the church, 'which is properly and principally the Spirit himself'. In a passage compacted densely with biblical allusions and echoes, Tertullian envisages the Spirit – 'in whom is the Trinity of the one Godhead' – as creating the church which consists in 'the (two or) three'. This 'church of the Spirit' may forgive grievous sinners after baptism, but it will decline to do so, lest discipline be relaxed (*Modesty* 21).

This treatise is of signal importance for the early history of penitential discipline. It is also the one which, more than any other, has given rise to the image of Tertullian as an anti-episcopal schismatic. Its tone is shrill and the satire biting – but wonderfully effective. In its favour was the *casus belli* – a grotesque innovation in an utterly wrong direction. Why should not change be for 'the better'?

Idolatry

Of Tertullian's other writings in this third ethical-disciplinary grouping only one deserves more than brief mention, *Idolatry*.⁹ It has been given widely differing dates by commentators. If nothing in it is unmistakably Montanist, its strictness accords well with the ethos of his undoubted Montanist productions. On the other hand, if an early work, it surely supports that interpretation of Tertullian's progress which tracks in it no abrupt changes of direction but only unrelenting linear movement towards one pole. *Idolatry* is richly instructive on the interaction of Christian and pagan in Carthaginian society, for its main burden so inflates the definition of idolatry as to require the Christian's withdrawal from many areas of communal life. Taking his hermeneutical cue from the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus deepened the scope of some of the Decalogue, Tertullian does the same with the prohibition of idolatry. Christians must be on their guard, eternally vigilant, against the long reach of idolatry. Everyone who contributed to the making of an idol is guilty of idolatry: 'what must not be worshipped must not be made . . . You worship them when you make them such as can be worshipped' (4.1; 6.2). With the retort 'I have nothing else to live by' Tertullian will have no truck. Throughout the work he ridicules and shames plaintive protests against his rigour. He has no difficulty citing words of Jesus in the face of those who plead lack of livelihood or care of family. 'Faith fears no hunger' (12.4). He proceeds to rule out a wide range of occupations which are intrinsically idolatrous (including astrology: 'A fine astrologer you are, if you did not know you would become a Christian!' [9.8]) or idolatrous by inescapable associations – such as school-teaching, shopkeeping ('It is no defence that the same wares . . . imported for sacrifice to idols, are also used by men and women as medicines and by us Christians as aids to burial as well' [11.2]), trainers of gladiators, military service (the subject of Tertullian's *The Soldier's Crown*, dated by some writers close to *Idolatry*), magistrates.

He also surveys the activities of social life. He says little about public entertainments, referring to his volume on *The Shows* (*De spectaculis*), where at a stroke he condemns every place of recreation – circus, stadium, theatre, amphitheatre, and every kind of spectacle they might host. If it is an extravaganza you want, the coming judgement day will furnish a stunning display. Christians may not teach, but Christian children have to learn, because the principles involved in the two

activities differ. A pupil does not commend, as a teacher cannot avoid doing, and a pupil can escape a teacher's entanglement with the defilements of school life from festivals and seasonal rituals. But the concession of schooling for children is not uncharacteristic of the book even if it becomes casuistical in the process. Attendance at various family celebrations is permitted: 'I am disposed to think that we are in no danger from the whiff of idolatry which occurs at them' (16.1) – but only so long as the invitation does not mention participation in the sacrifice. One can speak a god's name . . . when directing someone to the temple of Jupiter! But there are no exceptions for the military; for example, no soldier who continues to serve, even in the rank and file with no requirement to offer sacrifices or shed blood, can be admitted to the faith.

Threaded through the pages is a series of axioms: 'At no point ought I to be an indispensable instrument to another person's doing what I may not do myself' (11.4); 'Let us mourn while the world rejoices, and afterwards rejoice when the world mourns' (13.4); 'I wish it were possible for us never to see what we must not do' (16.4). And Tertullian time and again rejects appeal to a scriptural quotation (Paul said 'I please men in all things' [14:3]), thereby reflecting the internal discussions of Christians of Carthage on appropriate Christian behaviour.

Idolatry connects with other works of Tertullian, such as *To the Martyrs* and *Apology*, and in its attention to various kinds of dress, especially forms of the toga, with a constant preoccupation of his, seen in *Women's Dress* (*De cultu feminarum*) for example. Here Tertullian spares readers no detail of current cosmetics, jewellery and



Figure 40.5 The animal exit from the Roman amphitheatre in Carthage. Photo A. N. S. Lane.

fashion. Much is calculated today to raise a gentle smile, but the seriously religious underpinning is never far away and can still inspire an affecting peroration.

Go forth decked out in the cosmetics and ornaments of prophets and apostle, drawing your whiteness from simplicity, your ruddy hue from modesty, painting your eyes with bashfulness and your lips with reticence, fixing in your ears the word of God, fastening to your neck the yoke of Christ . . . Clothe yourselves with the silk of integrity, the fine linen of holiness, the purple of modesty. Thus arrayed you will have God for lover.

(*Women's Dress* 2.13.7)

Tertullian was never dull, but frequently infuriating, not least in his clipped, elliptical, telegram-style Latin. The richness and freshness of his vocabulary, his dexterity in phraseology and his command of every figure in the rhetorician's book made him a remarkably forceful writer. As Vincent of Lérins put it in the early fifth century, 'the cogency of his argument compelled assent even when it failed to persuade. Almost every word was a sentence; every statement a victory' (*Commonitorium* 18). Rarely did he lay aside the combative vigour of the disputant out to win a case, but he did so in his early treatise on *Prayer* (*De oratione*). It contains the earliest extant exposition of the Lord's Prayer, in which Tertullian discerned 'an epitome of the whole gospel' (1.6). The work's practical directness (which may be contrasted with Origen's more speculative interpretation) reflects a quality that stamps all Tertullian's writing. His scriptural exegesis was generally literal and historical rather than allegorical (O'Malley 1967). Everything he wrote had in view the challenging existence of a minority Christian community, for whom fidelity to Christian beliefs and mores could raise issues of life and death. He was a passionate advocate of a Christianity of radical discontinuity. As the churches in the West, not least in Europe, seem set for an experience of living as a minority unparalleled since the early centuries, this ancient Father of Latin Christianity may still prove a prophet for a new day (Bediako 1992: 100–36).

NOTES

- 1 Barnes (1985), Fredouille (1972). On Roman Africa, see Raven (1993), and on Carthage Picard (1964) and Lancel (1994). For an interesting popular account of Christianity in Roman North Africa, see Daniel (1993).
- 2 The most complete English translation of Tertullian's works is in four volumes in the *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, eds Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1867–70; with later reprints). In addition to individual translations, smaller or greater selections appear in other series, including *Ancient Christian Writers*, *Library of Christian Classics* and *Fathers of the Church*. A list of translations to 1970 appears in Barnes (1985: 286–90), and fuller details of all works in Quasten (1953: 246–340). The complete Latin text is edited in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 1–2 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1954). Excellent bilingual (Latin–French) editions of many works have been published in the *Sources Chrétiennes* series, and Latin–English of some edited by Ernest Evans. Unless otherwise indicated, translations given in this chapter are the present writer's (with some indebtedness to the *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*).

- 3 Powell (1975), Braun (1985), Rankin (1995: 27–51), Rives (1995: 273–85); on Montanism, see Robeck (1992) and Trevett (1996).
- 4 Daniélou (1977: 17–98); among criticisms, Orbán (1976), but support from Quispel (1982).
- 5 Helpful introductions to each work discussed in this chapter will be found in Quasten (1953: 246–340).
- 6 For an outstanding commentary, with an edition of the text, see Waszink (1947).
- 7 Daniélou (1977: 344, and 343–404 generally) for a perceptive characterization of Tertullian's thought.
- 8 The title is to be translated simply 'monogamy' rather than in a manner that would bring out the treatise's opposition to remarriage, because Tertullian regards second marriage as a breach of monogamy.
- 9 There is a fine translation in Greenslade (1956), on which the quotations given here are based, and text, translation and commentary in Waszink and Van Winden (1987).

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PERPETUA AND FELICITAS



Ross S. Kraemer and Shira L. Lander

INTRODUCTION

Within a series of profiles of prominent early Christians, Perpetua and Felicitas differ from the others considered in this volume for several crucial reasons. First, and perhaps most obviously, they are the only women. Second, and perhaps more importantly, whereas all the men profiled here are well-known through their own extensive writings, or through the detailed writings of others, Perpetua and Felicitas are essentially known only from a work narrating their gruesome martyrdom in North Africa in the early third century CE that claims to incorporate Perpetua's own account of her imprisonment and divinely inspired visions.¹ Third, both women are said to have been extremely young when they died: the so-called *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (hereafter *Passio*) cares chiefly about their recent conversion to Christianity, their exemplary deaths, and in the case of Perpetua, but not Felicitas, her various visions. It offers only a modicum of biographical data for Perpetua, and virtually none for Felicitas. Thus, writing their 'profiles' becomes a substantially different endeavour from writing a profile of an Origen, an Augustine or an Athanasius.

Perpetua and Felicitas are by no means the only women martyrs in early Christian traditions. The fourth-century church historian, Eusebius of Caesarea, includes a *Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Viennes* narrating the martyrdom of an enslaved woman named Blandina and three male companions in 177 CE (Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.1.3–63). The so-called *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* appears to reproduce the trial account of six Christians, three women and three men, in Carthage, North Africa, in 180 CE. What distinguishes Perpetua, and Felicitas by association, is the claim that a portion of the *Passio* is written by Perpetua herself, *manu sua*, in her own hand.² If true, as contemporary scholarship generally takes it to be, Perpetua is the first and only known Christian woman to write in her own name before the fourth century CE.³ Furthermore, because this portion of the *Passio* (re)presents Perpetua's experiences, emotions and visions, it constitutes, if authentic, the only first-person account of a Christian woman's experiences. Its potential significance, then, is inestimable, and recent feminist scholarship in particular has been much taken with Perpetua for precisely these reasons.⁴

SYNOPSIS OF THE *PASSIO*

After a prologue in defence and praise of recent visions, a brief narrative frame at the beginning of the *Passio* (2.1–2) relates that at an unspecified time and place, for an unspecified reason, a number of catechumens (recent converts who had not yet been baptized) were placed under arrest. Three were men: Revocatus, Saturninus and Secundulus. Two were women: Felicitas, described as the *conserva* (probably co-slave) of Revocatus, and Vibia Perpetua, described as well-educated (*liberaliter instituta*), elite (*bonesta*) and properly married (*matronaliter nupta*). Both her parents were still living, as were two brothers, one a catechumen but himself inexplicably not arrested.⁵ Although Perpetua had a baby boy still nursing, the entire *Passio* is silent on the identity and whereabouts of her husband.

It is difficult to reconstruct the specific experiences of the catechumens from the portion attributed to Perpetua herself. It appears that between the time she was arrested and the time she and the others were detained in a public prison, Perpetua had occasion both to argue with her father over her Christianity (3.1–3), and to receive formal baptism (3.5a). Once imprisoned, the catechumens were held in a particularly hellish location (3.5b–6), but moved to a more comfortable place after the deacons Tertius and Pomponius bribe the prison guards. Perpetua takes advantage of the respite to nurse her famished baby and then hand him over temporarily to the care of her mother and brother until she receives permission to keep the child with her (3.8–9).

At this point, the first of four visions is related in Perpetua's voice (4.1–10). Prompted by her brother, Perpetua asks for and receives a vision in which she ascends a bronze ladder into heaven, together with Saturus, the catechumens' teacher who was not initially arrested with them but who is also subsequently martyred. At the foot of the ladder lies an enormous dragon; all along the sides of the ladder are sharp weapons. Once safely in heaven, Perpetua encounters a grey-haired man in shepherd's clothing milking sheep in an immense garden populated with thousands of people in white garments. Welcoming Perpetua as his child, the man offers her some of the milk. When she consumes it, all present say 'amen', and Perpetua wakes with a sweet taste in her mouth. Recounting the vision to her brother, Perpetua realizes that the Christians are fated to suffer and die. Shortly thereafter, a rumour spreads that the catechumens are to have a hearing (5.1a). Perpetua's father appears just in time to beg his daughter once again to reconsider (5.1b–5). Although she claims to pity his old age, Perpetua is unmoved (5.6). Abruptly summoned some-time later to a formal hearing in the forum, she resists her father's importuning yet a third time, confesses to being a Christian and is sentenced, along with her companions, to fight with the beasts (6.1–6).

Back in prison, Perpetua sends Pomponius, who seems to have free access to the prisoners, to fetch her baby. He has apparently been returned to her father's care, although the account provides no explanation of when or how (6.7). Her father refuses to yield the child, but conveniently, if not miraculously, the child loses interest in nursing and Perpetua's milk supply dries up without causing her any discomfort (6.8).

Soon thereafter, Perpetua's second vision occurs (7.3–8), in which she sees her

deceased younger brother Dinocrates suffering the traditional torments of the unfortunate dead. He is hot, thirsty, pale, and still bears the marks of the facial cancer that killed him. In front of the child she sees a pool of water, but the refreshment the dead seek is beyond his small reach. Perpetua prays for Dinocrates for days, until the prisoners are transferred to a military prison. That night, she has another vision (8.1–4), in which she sees Dinocrates clean and refreshed, a scar where the wound had been, and the rim of the pool now lowered to a height he can reach. Above the rim floats a golden bowl, from which she sees Dinocrates drink his fill and then go off to play. Waking, Perpetua realizes that Dinocrates suffers no more.

As the date of her contest approaches, Perpetua's father returns a fourth time. Perpetua repeats her sorrow for him, but does not relate her reply, if any, to him.

Her fourth and final vision (10.1–13) is set the day before the contest. Led by Pomponius into the arena, Perpetua finds herself to be a man, set to fight a repulsive-looking Egyptian. An immensely tall man clad in a purple tunic and marvellous sandals of gold and silver presides over the fight. Ultimately, Perpetua triumphs over the Egyptian: while her assistants sing psalms, she receives a branch with golden apples from the man. After he kisses her, saying 'Peace be with you, my daughter', she walks out through the Gate of Life. Waking, she understands that she is to fight the Devil and emerge victorious.

With this vision, the portion of the *Passio* ascribed to Perpetua ends and another vision, ascribed to Saturus, follows immediately (11.1–13.8). In this lengthiest of all the visions, Saturus and Perpetua, now dead, are carried by four angels to a heavenly garden, where they meet up with other martyrs not mentioned in the account ascribed to Perpetua, and are greeted and kissed by the Lord himself, an aged man with white hair and a youthful face. Having been told by elders to 'go and play' (*ite et ludite*: 12.6), Perpetua and Saturus find the bishop Optatus and the presbyter Aspasius feuding. When the two men implore them to intervene, Perpetua and Saturus demur, but Perpetua then speaks with them in Greek. Ultimately, angels instruct Optatus and Aspasius to settle their own dispute.

The remainder of the *Passio* (14.1–21.11) recounts the deaths of the martyrs, with the most extensive description reserved for that of Perpetua and Felicitas. Only now does the reader learn that Felicitas was eight months pregnant, and that she and her companions prayed successfully that she might deliver early. Otherwise, she would have had to wait to die until the birth of her child, since Roman law forbid the execution of a pregnant woman.

On the emperor's birthday, the catechumens are sent into the arena. Despite Perpetua's final vision of her combat as a man with the Egyptian, she and Felicitas are stripped naked, clad in netting, and sent to fight a wild heifer, the sex of the animal matching the sex of the martyrs (the men fought an assortment of leopard, bear and wild boar). Yet none of the martyrs dies of these wounds. Instead, all assent to the wishes of the perverse crowd and have their throats cut by the waiting gladiator. Perpetua herself must guide his hand into her throat after he initially misses and strikes a bone. The *Passio* concludes with a brief peroration comparable in style and theme to the more lengthy introduction.

ASSESSING THE HISTORICITY OF THE *PASSIO* AND OTHER PERPETUA TRADITIONS

The accounts of Perpetua's arrest, last days and martyrdom are usually titled *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*: some add their co-martyrs Saturus and Revocatus. The texts exist only in medieval manuscripts dating from the ninth through the seventeenth centuries. Apart from one Greek manuscript, all are Latin. The variety of the manuscripts presents obstacles to reconstructing a literary history for the Perpetua traditions. Moreover, their usefulness for reconstructing a historical account is hampered by conflicting and indeterminate historical references.

The situation is further complicated by the existence of another set of Perpetua materials, the *Acta*.⁶ The relative brevity of the *Acta* (approximately one-quarter the length of the *Passio*), suggests they may have been composed for public recitation rather than private reading (LeClercq 1939: 409). Although the earliest extant Perpetua manuscript is of the *Acta*, scholars believe that the traditions contained in these manuscripts but not in the *Passio* are late (not before the fifth century) and unreliable, thereby justifying their omission from historical reconstructions of Perpetua's life and death (Amat 1996: 271; van Beek [1936] 1956: 98).

A majority of scholars believe that Latin is the original language of the *Passio* text.⁷ All the traditions set Perpetua's martyrdom in North Africa, where Latin, Greek, and indigenous Punic were spoken. The texts either situate Perpetua's arrest in a small city about thirty miles south-west of Carthage called 'Thuburbo minor', in what is modern Tunisia, or they give no location for the events of the story (*Passio* 2.1; *Acta* 1.1). Some scholars take the amphitheatre description to refer to Carthage (Figure 41.1), since it would have been the only city large enough to contain an arena fully equipped with soldiers' quarters and a prison, and it was the seat of the provincial governor (Amat 1996: 22–5; Rives 1995: 78).

The texts also do not agree on the precise dates of Perpetua's martyrdom. The title of the Latin *Passio* gives the nones of March (also *Acta* 9.5), while the Greek has early February. The earliest calendar on which Perpetua and Felicitas are listed, the *Feriale Ecclesiae Romanae*, dated 354, lists the March date (Mommsen 1891: IX,71). Scholars have tended to accept the date commemorated on the Roman calendar, 7 March, without historical warrant.⁸ The fact that the February date corresponds to Perpetua's commemoration on the eastern calendar suggests that the traditions reflect alternative dates for commemorating Perpetua in different martyrological traditions rather than useful historical evidence for dating her martyrdom (Robinson 1891: 17).

Attempts to date the text are based on the assumption that Perpetua's martyrdom itself can be securely dated, accepting the historicity of the events as they are presented in the narrative. The only contemporaneous evidence for Perpetua outside the *Passio* is from the North African Christian writer, Tertullian, who adduces the heavenly vision of Perpetua, 'the most heroic martyr', as evidence that only the privileged few can enter heaven before the Final Resurrection (Tertullian, *De anima* 55.4). Since Tertullian had died by the Valerian persecution, he could not have known a Perpetua tradition which placed the martyrdom in the mid-third century.

External verification of Perpetua's martyrdom relies both on Tertullian's witness



Figure 41.1 The amphitheatre at Carthage. Photo J. C. N. Coulston.

and on historical evidence for persecutions that occurred during his lifetime. Thus, most scholars date the martyrdom to the reign of Septimius Severus.⁹ The fourth-century church historian Eusebius relates a Severan persecution in Alexandria, yet he mentions neither North Africa nor Perpetua and her companions (Eusebius, *H. E.* 6.4–5). The late and suspect *Historia Augusta*, a compilation of Roman history, relates a Severan edict that puts Christianity in the same category as Judaism: ‘it is forbidden to become Jews’, but a prohibition against proselytism seems likely to be anachronistic.¹⁰ Thus, even accepting the martyrdom’s historicity, attempts to explain Perpetua’s death as punishment for her conversion are probably misguided.

If Severus had not issued a recent ban on conversion, he might have encouraged a climate of episodic persecution of Christians, similar to the situation reported by Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia-Pontus in the early second century CE, in his letter to Trajan (Pliny, *Epistles* 10.96–7). The *Passio* conveys a sense of randomness about Perpetua’s arrest which would comport with such a climate. The arrest of the ‘young catechumens’ occurs without context or explanation and the passive construction (*Passio* 2.1) conceals those who may have ordered the arrest and why. There is no mention of mass arrests or widespread executions.¹¹ The friends and family who visit the martyrs in prison are not afraid to be associated with them. People are not fleeing to avoid arrest and persecution, or to avoid appearing before makeshift outdoor courts to prove their allegiance to the Roman deities, as we have in other representations of more systematic persecution (*pace* Cyprian, Lactantius and Eusebius). When this group of Christians ‘suddenly’ receives a hearing at the forum

(*Passio* 6.1), the governor merely asks Perpetua to perform a sacrifice on behalf of the emperors. When she demurs, he then asks, 'Christiana es?' to which she replies affirmatively (*Passio* 6.3–4). The crime of being Christian, in so far as it prevents this upper-class Roman matron from performing her civic duty, is Hilarianus' reason for condemning her to the beasts (*Passio* 6.6). Like the court accounts of Pliny, the martyr's hearing seems to indicate that admitting to being Christian and refusing to sacrifice were sufficient to incur punishment.¹²

An early dating (for the martyrdom and the *Passio*) does not depend only on demonstrating the historical plausibility of these events.¹³ It depends also on how one interprets seemingly historical references in the *Passio*. Many scholars identify the governor Hilarianus, successor of Minucius Timinianus (*Passio* 6.3–5, 18.8), with the P. Aelius Hilarianus mentioned by Tertullian (*Ad Scapulam* {*To Scapula*} 3.1), and the Caesar in celebration of whose birthday the martyrs are to be ceremonially killed (*Passio* 7.9) as Geta, the emperor's son (later rejected for the throne and ostracized by his brother, Caracalla). Each piece of evidence has problems rendering them inconclusive at best as support for a Severan date.¹⁴

The problem of dating by itself should alert the careful reader to the difficulty of identifying the extant medieval manuscripts with a literary tradition dating back to the early third century. Tertullian mentions Perpetua only in a passing reference and refers neither to a text nor to a commemoration. No other third-century literature, inscription, or author mentions her. Despite the fact that Tertullian and Cyprian, the mid-third-century bishop of Carthage, both mention offerings and prayers on behalf of the departed (Tertullian, *De corona militis* 3; Cyprian, *Epistles* 12.2.1), neither mentions the practice of reading a Passion text on the anniversary of a martyr's death. By itself, Tertullian's reference may merely evidence a local oral tradition and not acquaintance with the *Passio*, although many scholars read it this way. It is not until the fourth century that these artefacts of Perpetua's martyrdom, text and commemoration, can be securely identified.

The earliest evidence of Perpetua's commemoration appears on the liturgical Calendar of Rome in 354.¹⁵ Canon 47 of the Council of Carthage which took place in 397 permits such commemorative texts to be read even though they are not canonical writings,¹⁶ reflecting a trend also apparent in Palestine and Asia Minor towards a containment of saint veneration within the physical and temporal boundaries of the church.

This institutionalization of saint devotion converges with the evidence provided by three sermons of Augustine, bishop of Hippo, at the end of the fourth century. Augustine marks the occasion as the anniversary of the martyrdoms (*dies natales*: literally birthdays) of Perpetua and Felicitas, and provides the first known reference to an actual text of the Passion which was read in his basilica.¹⁷ Augustine's homilies contain many of the traditions preserved by the medieval manuscripts of the *Passio*. There are, however, unexplained ambiguities which suggest that his text is not identical to the *Passio*. Details of Augustine's discussion and those found in a fifth-century sermon, now referred to as 'pseudo-Augustine', conflict with what has been preserved as the *Passio* text.¹⁸

According to Pseudo-Augustine, Felicitas accompanies Perpetua up the ladder to the heavenly garden, not Saturus as in the *Passio*. Two of the images they see, the

simultaneously old and young shepherd and the surrounding vessels of milk, differ from the extant *Passio*. In Pseudo-Augustine, Perpetua and Felicitas see 'a shepherd both young and old' who shows them vessels of milk. In the *Passio*, it is Satorius who sees in his vision 'an aged man with white hair and a youthful face' (12.3), an image evoking Rev. 1.13–14 and Dan. 7.9. The heavenly visions of both Satorius and Perpetua in the *Passio* use the pronoun 'we' to indicate Satorius and Perpetua. Pseudo-Augustine and Augustine use the plural to refer to Felicitas and Perpetua (Augustine, *Sermo* 280). It seems that either our texts have emended the original company of Felicitas to Satorius, or an earlier tradition, no longer extant, had replaced Satorius with Felicitas.

Rather than suggesting these ancient commentators made a 'mistake' in their references to a Perpetua tradition, the evidence suggests that the attribution of the visions was not a consistent tradition.¹⁹ All the visions of heavenly ascents may have originally been assigned to Perpetua and Felicitas alone, since the day of commemoration bears their names. Felicitas may have become a problematic figure for the post-Constantinian church. A pregnant slave who seemingly wills the life-threatening premature delivery of her own child so that she too may win the crown of martyrdom may have been written out of the vision by later editors or scribes.²⁰ As Brent Shaw has argued, the *Acta* give her a plebeian husband, whom she publicly rejects (5.2–6.1), to mitigate the scandal of her circumstances (Shaw 1993: 33–42).

In its final form, The *Passio* of Perpetua and Felicitas consists of three narrative layers. The middle core claims to be the original account of the martyr Perpetua herself, just as written by her hand and from her point of view: *sicut conscriptum manu sua et suo sensu* (*Passio* 2.3). This core relates the events from the arrest of Perpetua and her companions up to the day of her martyrdom, including the visions or dreams she has during this time. An editorial framework surrounds this core, which introduces the prison section, then continues the account of Perpetua's martyrdom from where she left off as well as that of her companions (presented as the editor's eyewitness account), and concludes with a doxological exhortation. An anomalous insertion after Perpetua's diary claims to be Satorius' account of his prison vision; as we have previously seen, this dream, or some form of it, might well have been originally attributed to Perpetua herself. The differences in style and theme between this vision and those of Perpetua within the prison narrative may suggest, though, that the vision has undergone significant revision in the process of reassignment.

The identity of the editor remains obscure as does his or her religious perspective, which we shall consider further (pp. 1061–2). The more interesting question, from the perspective of women's authorship and self-representation in antiquity, is whether Perpetua actually wrote the prison section of the *Passio*.

Writing something in someone else's name is a widespread practice in the ancient world, whether understood as intentional fraud or pious fiction. Tertullian himself denounces an anonymous presbyter in Asia Minor whom, he says, forged the story of Paul and Thecla, although he concedes that the presbyter claimed to do so out of love for Paul.²¹ (Whether Tertullian is here correct is irrelevant for present purposes: *De baptismo* 17.5). Further, the editor's claim, that Perpetua wrote it in her own hand, does not ensure its authenticity for the modern scholar. The same assertion

occurs, for instance, not only in several undisputed letters of Paul (1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; Philem. 19) but in letters now thought to be pseudonymous (Col. 4:18 and 2 Thess. 3:17, where the author's insistence on this point seems particularly telling).

Recently, Thomas Heffernan has critiqued the characterization of the prison narrative as a diary, the term regularly used by recent scholarship, and questioned the authenticity of Perpetua's section on philological grounds.²² Heffernan examines the prison narrative as *hypomnemata*, a catch-all genre which encompassed many types of non-rhetorical writing, including 'memoir, memorandum, note, diary, or commentary on an author' (Heffernan 1995: 321). Perpetua's dreams in particular, he argues, reflect a new emphasis on self-revelation emerging in the late second century. Heffernan points out that the text violates an essential aspect of the diary form: it provides 'deliberate temporal continuity . . . [using] such expressions as "after a few days", or "many days", "a few hours later", to indicate the passage of time and to introduce a new narrative sequence' (Heffernan 1995: 322). Furthermore, he points out, the grammar lacks an additional feature typical of diary writing: the verbs are mainly not conjugated in the present tense. Heffernan proposes instead that the prison narrative is a mediated account from one of Perpetua's visitors, to whom she revealed her dreams and the circumstances of her imprisonment (Heffernan 1995: 323–4).

Contemporary claims about the authenticity of the prison narrative often appeal to the controversial notion of a female rhetoric.²³ Emotional, personal, fragmented, and colloquial, the style of Perpetua's account is thought to prove the trustworthiness of the editor's claim. However, we are less confident that this style can be identified specifically with Perpetua herself and consider just as likely the possibility that this style is purposefully constructed by an ancient author to appear as a (female) martyr's diary. The essentialist claim that women in antiquity wrote in a distinctive and detectable form and voice collapses in view of ancient sources. Pliny the Younger, for instance, writes about

some letters which he [Pliny's friend, Pompeius Saturninus] said were written by his wife, but sounded to me [Pliny] like Plautus or Terence being read in prose. Whether they are really his wife's, as he says, or his own (which he denies) one can only admire him either for what he writes, or the way he has cultivated and refined the taste of the girl he married.

(Pliny *Ep.* 1.16.6, in Fantham *et al.* 1994: 349)

Pliny's identification of the style of the letters with that of Plautus and Terence, two male authors, leads him to conclude that either his friend's wife did not write them, or that she learned how to write in male rhetorical style from her husband. Implicit in Pliny's judgement may be a notion of a distinctive female writing style, to which these letters do not conform. Pliny ultimately concedes, despite his preconceptions, that a woman could be trained to write 'like a man'.

That, further, a man could write like a woman, in a voice recognizable as female, is evident from the majority of ancient playwrights and novelists who devoted much of their work to constructing gendered representations not only of characters, but of their speeches and letters as well. In so doing, they appealed to assumptions about gendered language that may also be reflected in Pliny's remarks. Chariton, in his

novel *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, has Callirhoe write a letter, which he has, of course, composed himself. Chariton writes in the letter, 'this letter is written in my own hand' (Reardon 1989: 116). Likewise, Xenophon has Manto write a love letter in which she exclaims that she 'can no longer contain herself, improperly, perhaps for a girl' (Reardon 1989: 141). Additional evidence may be found in the intriguing but generally ignored pseudepigraphic correspondence allegedly between one Mary of Cassabola and Ignatius of Antioch (Kraemer 1991: 236–9). Both letters are clearly written by the same author, so either a woman has written in both male and female voices, or a man has done so. In either case, our dilemma is apparent, if its solution is not.

Thus, attempts to verify the authenticity of Perpetua's narrative on gendered stylistic grounds prove troubling.²⁴ Furthermore, the similarity of the section to other autobiographical narratives which are considered authentic but heavily edited and rewritten, such as Aelius Aristides' *The Sacred Tales*, should give us pause about identifying stylistic features as a sign of authenticity rather than as self-consciously constructed rhetorical devices. As Glen Bowersock has aptly stated, 'Whether Perpetua's words, in whatever language, allow us to hear an authentic and distinctive woman's voice . . . is much more doubtful. How would we tell?' (Bowersock 1995: 34).

Our scepticism about the diary's authorship draws further support from a comment made by Augustine in a discussion of infant baptism. He mentions Perpetua's ability to intervene on behalf of her deceased brother's soul, citing the *Passio* text which 'is not itself a canonical writing, whether she herself wrote it or whether anyone else wrote it' (*De natura et origine animae* 4.10.12; our translation). Augustine doubts that Perpetua wrote this account, yet his concerns pass unremarked through centuries of transmission.

Finally, the startling degree to which the specifics of the *Passio* conform to the biblical citation of Joel 2:28–9/Acts 2:17–18 contributes to our concerns. It is possible, indeed perhaps tempting, to read the *Passio* in its present form as a narrative dramatization of this citation, as it appears here:

For in the last [literally newest] days, says the Lord, I will pour out my spirit over all flesh and their sons and daughters will prophesy; and I will pour my spirit over my male servants and female servants (*servos et ancillas meas*) and the young shall see visions and the old shall dream dreams.

(*Passio* 1.4)

Many elements of the *Passio* conform closely to the specifics of this prophecy. As the prologue makes clear, the events of the *Passio* take place in these newest days (1.1–3). The outpouring of the divine spirit over all flesh may be depicted in the catechumens as a whole, or even in the larger phenomenon of conversion to Christianity which they may represent, although admittedly, the *Passio* is not terribly specific on this point. Perpetua and probably Saturus demonstrate the prophesying sons and daughters. The extraordinary emphasis on Perpetua's role as a daughter, primarily through her relationship with her father, coheres exceedingly well with the characterization of the female prophets as daughters.

The precise citation of the biblical verses in the *Passio* does not correspond exactly

to any other known ancient Latin translations of either Joel 2:28–9 or Acts 2:17–18. Where the Hebrew, Greek and Vulgate all modify the sons, daughters, male servants and female servants, with the possessive ‘your’, the *Passio* applies the third-person plural ‘theirs’ (*eorum*) to the sons and daughters, and lacks any possessive for the young visionaries and the old dreamers.²⁵ Applied to Perpetua, this adjective seems particularly apt. Born to pagan parents, she is ‘their’ daughter in at least two senses: she is not only of the gentiles, but the daughter of two living parents. Such a reading provides one way of making sense of the limited presence of her mother. The emphasis on Perpetua’s noble birth and elite social status may also stem from the redactor’s desire to characterize her as the daughter distinct from the female servants (*ancillae*).

While Acts 2:18 predicts that the servants will also prophesy, Joel limits this activity to the sons and daughters, as does the citation in the *Passio*. And not surprisingly, none of the slaves prophesy. They appear only to receive the Spirit, most notably perhaps in the response to their prayers for Felicitas’ early delivery, and probably also in their baptism. Their very presence in the story enhances the conformity of the *Passio* to the biblical verses. Interestingly, apart from her description as the *conserva* of Revocatus, there is no reason to think that Felicitas is a slave.²⁶ Yet the characterization of Felicitas and Revocatus as *conservi*, construed as co-slaves, enhances the correspondence of the prophecy and the *Passio*, which requires examples of slaves who receive the spirit, if not also who prophesy.

At several points, the redactor emphasizes both the youth of the catechumens as a whole, and that of Perpetua in particular. They are described as *adolescentes* (2.1), while she is 22 (2.3) and still called *puella* (20.1–2). The attention to her age and the emphasis on her visions coheres with the prediction of the young seeing visions. While the cultivation of visionary experience seems to have characterized much of North African Christianity, one might wonder whether the correspondence results from an existing tradition about Perpetua, or from the prophecy itself.

Admittedly, several components of the biblical prophecy, as quoted in the *Passio*, are less apparent, including the pouring out of the divine spirit ‘over all flesh’, the prophesying sons and the aged dreamers. The awkward integration of the figure and vision of Saturus into the text, which we noted earlier, may represent an attempt to offer an example of the prophesying son. It may also supply the old dreaming dreams, since his age is not specified, and he is not among the adolescent catechumens, but is rather their teacher, and therefore presumably somewhat older. Alternatively, the author of the *Passio* may find it sufficient to demonstrate partial fulfilment of the biblical text. In any case, the collective prophecies, visions and reception of the divine spirit in the *Passio* clearly represent fulfilment of this particular phrasing of ancient divine prophecy.

Thus, yet another explanation for the formation of the *Passio* is that its original core is an account of the imprisonment and visions of a martyr, Perpetua, with or without Felicitas, and that many of the additions function, intentionally, to demonstrate the fulfilment of the prophecy. If this reading has merit, it points to an author who looks for the fulfilment of biblical prophecies in the details of historical experience. Our discussion of the probable history of the traditions about Perpetua, and of the *Passio* itself, suggests that it is unlikely that the entire martyrdom of Perpetua is

generated out of the biblical passage(s), but it seems quite possible that both the general outline and many of the details of the prison narrative and the remaining sections are shaped to conform to the biblical text.²⁷

In consideration of the myriad challenges the *Passio* poses to historical claims about the martyrdom of Perpetua, and the serious questions raised about the authenticity of the prison section, we consider it impossible to identify the original source of this martyrdom account. At some level, the account may reflect the experience of a young Carthaginian woman, an elite Roman matron, who was possibly executed for her adherence to Christianity, yet historical certainty is simply unattainable. While recent scholarship generally considers the prison account of Perpetua to be authentic and accurate, and the *Passio* as a whole to be a reasonably trustworthy representation of the martyrdom of Perpetua, Felicitas, and their male associates, it is our assessment that the hagiographic tradition may not be historically reliable to a sufficient degree to permit a profile of Perpetua and Felicitas comparable to what may be possible for other persons in the current section of this volume. Rather, what we may have is a 'representation' whose correspondence to actual persons and events cannot be determined. Nevertheless, if we assume for the sake of discussion that a sufficient amount of the *Passio* is rooted in actual historical events, we may explore a number of questions pertinent to a profile of the two women. The remainder of this chapter will endeavour to do just this.

PERPETUA AND FELICITAS: A PROVISIONAL PROFILE

As we noted at the outset, the *Passio* as a whole is not much interested in the lives of these martyrs prior to their conversion to Christianity and their consequent arrest. In this regard, it appears to differ markedly from the genre of Christian biographies, or *Lives*, itself modelled on Graeco-Roman forms, that flourishes from the fourth century on.²⁸ While hagiographic interests shape the use of biographic details in those accounts, the *Lives* nevertheless typically not only narrate birth, education and familial relationships, but also offer extended examples of piety and self-abnegation.

Scholars have heavily mined the significant amount of apparent biographical data about Perpetua condensed into the brief lines of *Passio* 2.1–3. Perpetua was a member of an old established family of Roman citizens, the Vibii, well-documented in North Africa.²⁹ According to one family of Latin manuscripts (identified by the Greek letter gamma) and the only extant Greek manuscript, she came from a town called Thuburbo Minus west of Carthage.³⁰ Shaw concludes that '[s]he came, therefore, from a solid municipal family, no doubt of some local wealth and prestige' (Shaw 1993: 11).

The narrator claims that Perpetua was not only born into the *honestiores*, but was the recipient of a liberal education (*liberaliter instituta*) that would have included training in Latin grammar and rhetoric. Citing Ovid, Amat proposes that young women would also have been schooled in music and singing (Amat 1996: 193; Ovid, *Arx Amatoria* 3.35). Because the vision attributed to Saturus depicts Perpetua addressing the quarrelling church leaders in Greek, some scholars have argued that she was

literate in Greek as well, but the scepticism of both Amat and Shaw on this point seems well-taken (Amat 1996: 193; Shaw 1993: 12, n. 34).

That the daughters of citizen families would have been formally educated is substantiated by numerous ancient sources.³¹ If Perpetua is indeed the author of the prison narrative, she was obviously sufficiently well-educated to compose it, and to write it in her own hand. In that portion of the *Passio*, scholars have seen allusions to Latin literature that bolster these claims.³² The description of Perpetua as *liberaliter instituta* functions to affirm the claim that she is the writer of the prison account: it is precisely what we might expect from an author who wished to 'authenticate' the representation of a woman writer.

The narrator informs readers that Perpetua was *matronaliter nupta*, a phrase that appears to indicate that by virtue of her marriage Perpetua attained the status of *matrona* (Amat 1996: 193). As numerous commentators have observed, neither the narrative frame nor the prison account provides any information regarding the identity or whereabouts of Perpetua's husband. Since she is not described as a widow, many scholars have assumed that her husband opposed her conversion to Christianity, and that this opposition accounts for his absence throughout the *Passio*. Such an interpretation accords well with numerous other early Christian representations of the dynamics of women's conversion to Christianity, from the story in Justin Martyr of the unnamed woman whose acceptance of ascetic Christianity causes her husband to bring charges against her and her Christian teachers (2 *Apology* 2.4ff.), to the numerous tales in the Apocryphal Acts from Thecla on. Conceivably, then, the absent (and here anonymous) husband may be understood as a standard type in early Christian conversion narratives whose opposition requires no explanation. But equally possible, however, the troublingly absent husband may be viewed as evidence for some historical core of the narrative, on the logic that his absence creates more problems than it solves, and is thus unlikely to be fictive.

According to the narrator, Perpetua's parents are both still living, as are two brothers, one of whom is said to be a catechumen as well. She is herself 22, and the mother of a son young enough to be still nursing, which would probably make him less than three years old. Assuming the boy to be her first child, or at least her first living child, this would accord well with a marriage at about age 18, consistent with other evidence for the age at first marriage for elite Roman women (Shaw 1987).

This portrait of Perpetua is generally consistent with that of the account attributed to the martyr herself, although not completely. The prison narrative itself mentions (but never names) the father, the mother, and the baby boy. The catechumen brother is more problematic. Within the prison narrative, Perpetua at one point entrusts her baby to the care of her mother and brother, which suggests that he is not imprisoned, nor is there any particular reason to think he is also a Christian (3.8). In 4.1, however, Perpetua relates that 'her brother' told her to ask for a vision about her fate (but not their fate), which she does. Coming to, Perpetua relates the vision of Saturus and the ladder to her 'brother'. Although the language of 4.10 suggests that this 'brother' is also a Christian, it is impossible to say whether the brother is with Perpetua in prison, or a visitor. As Amat notes, 'brother' may signify both a true sibling, or a fellow Christian. Perpetua's description of Dinocrates (the only member of her family to be named) as her brother 'in the flesh' (7.5) may suggest that we

should understand the unnamed brother in chapter 4 as simply another Christian.³³

As many scholars have recently considered, the portrait of Perpetua's relationship with her father in the prison narrative is particularly fascinating. Of all Perpetua's familial relationships, this one receives the most extensive articulation. Perpetua's four visions are interwoven with four confrontations in which her father begs her to renounce her Christianity. The visions and the confrontations may well be inter-related: aspects of the father may be seen not only in the grey-haired old man milking sheep in the first vision, but in the enormous dragon in the same vision and the hideous Egyptian in the third vision, both of whose heads Perpetua steps on (4.7; 10.11; Lefkowitz 1976).

By comparison, Perpetua's relationship with her mother receives short shrift. Only in 3.8 does Perpetua speak with her mother, concerning her anxiety for her infant son and arrangements for his care. How Perpetua's mother felt about her conversion and impending martyrdom is never explicit. Nowhere does her mother implore her to desist, although in 5.3 Perpetua's father begs her to think of the pain her death will cause her mother. Shaw takes Perpetua's statement in 5.6 to mean that Perpetua's family in general opposed her Christianity, and thought her impending death appropriate punishment, but the words 'he [the father] alone of all my family would not rejoice to see me suffer' (*solus de passione mea gausurus non esset de toto genere meo*) could easily be construed to mean that Perpetua's other relatives would rejoice in her suffering because they knew that it would lead to her immediate glorification (Amat 1996: 31, 209). Whether this means that the mother and other relatives may have been Christians themselves, it seems at least that they sympathized with Perpetua's Christianity.

If the prison narrative is indeed autobiographical, it alludes to a complex father-daughter relationship common to the dynamics of elite citizen families, in which fathers lavished devotion and attention on their daughters, while the relationships of mothers and daughters were relatively minimal.³⁴ Imploring her to abandon her Christianity, Perpetua's father reminds her of how he favoured her above all her brothers. Shaw, Elm and Perkins, in particular, have demonstrated the extent to which the interactions between father and daughter function as an apt expression of the Christian critique and inversion of Roman power relations.³⁵ They focus in particular on the exchange in chapter 5, where Perpetua's father calls her no longer *filia* (daughter) but *domina* (5.5), the feminine form of *dominus*, lord or master.³⁶ While Shaw and Elm (and many others) take these scenes to be more or less accurate, the utility of these interactions might suggest that their representation is a more deliberate artifice than might initially appear.

Virtually no biographical data is offered for Felicitas, who figures only in the narrative sections, and is never mentioned in the account attributed to Perpetua. All that we are told of her is that she was a slave, the *conserva*, or co-slave, of Revocatus,³⁷ and was many months pregnant at the time of her arrest. With Perpetua, she is described as *puella* (20.1) which may signify her relative youth. Nothing suggests that she and Perpetua had any relationship prior to their shared martyrdom, or at least to their conversion to Christianity. No visions are attributed to Felicitas, nor any exercise of leadership or authority. Since, as we noted earlier, the fifth-century homily falsely attributed to Augustine has Felicitas, not Saturus, ascend the ladder

to heaven with Perpetua, it may be that Felicitas' status as a slave lies behind eventual suppression of earlier traditions in which Felicitas fills a role subsequently co-opted by Saturus.³⁸ Interestingly, though, neither Augustine, Pseudo-Augustine nor Quodvultdeus characterize Felicitas as enslaved, and we have already raised questions about the historicity of the claim that Felicitas was a slave.

What kind of Christian might Perpetua (and perhaps Felicitas) have been? The language of the prologue, with its citation of Joel 2:28–9/Acts 2:17–18, and its praise of new prophecies and visions, has long suggested an association with the Christian revivalist movement known as the New Prophecy, or Montanism (see Chapter 36 in this volume). Originating in Phrygia (in ancient Asia Minor; modern Turkey) around the third quarter of the second century CE, the movement appears to have been founded by a male prophet named Montanus, and two women prophets named Priscilla and Maximilla. It attracted significant support not only in Asia Minor but also in North Africa at the end of the second century: Tertullian himself was a Montanist for a some significant period of his life.³⁹ Characteristic of the movement was a resurgence of charismatic activity, including prophecy, leadership roles for women based on such activity, and heightened eschatological expectation. Although the New Prophecy encountered considerable opposition from proto-orthodox Christians, it seems to have survived well into the fourth century.⁴⁰

Numerous elements of the *Passio* would be consistent with what we know of the New Prophecy. Among these are Saturus' own vision, the authority Perpetua exercises there, the visions reported in her own voice, and even the citation of Joel 2:28–9/Acts 2:17–18. Numerous scholars have remarked on the possible correlation between Perpetua's consumption of a Eucharistic cheese-like substance in her first vision, and reports that the Montanists celebrated a Eucharist of bread and cheese.⁴¹

Yet the Montanist character of the *Passio* is not without problems. Nothing in the text is unambiguously Montanist. Precisely the elements often adduced as indicators of Montanism, including an emphasis on prophecy and heightened eschatological interest, appear typical of much Christianity in North Africa in this period. So, too, the interpretation of dreams as divine revelations and an emphasis on their power, particularly for confessors (those prisoners waiting to be martyred), appears to have been commonplace.⁴² Cyprian describes his own actions as 'prompted by the Holy Spirit and counselled by the Lord through many explicit visions' (Cyprian, *Ep.* 57.5.1). He equates visions and revelations, and maintains their power to predict the future (Cyprian, *Ep.* 11.4.1–5.1). Furthermore, Maureen Tilley offers strong arguments that 'The *Passion* lacks the central and distinctive attributes of Montanist literature'; namely, asceticism, millenarianism, and ecstatic prophecies (Tilley 1994: 835).

The question of martyrdom is particularly troublesome. Opponents of the New Prophecy accused its members of avoiding martyrdom, which, if true, would certainly weaken the identification of the *Passio* as Montanist. On the other hand, if members of the New Prophecy wished to represent themselves as exemplary martyrs, the *Passio* would certainly constitute an effective means of doing so.

Although one of us has earlier analysed Perpetua and the *Passio* from the vantage point of Montanism, it seems wise to conclude that the matter cannot be resolved with any certainty (Kraemer 1992: 157–73). It is certainly possible that whoever composed the prologue was indeed a Montanist, and even intended both the

quotation of Joel 2:28–9/Acts 2:17–18 and the defence of contemporary prophecy to signal this identity. Such an author may also have understood Perpetua to have been a member of the movement, as evidenced in particular by her consumption of the Eucharistic cheese in her vision. If the visions are authentic, Perpetua may indeed have been a member of the New Prophecy. Were this to be the case, it might account for a puzzling aspect of the *Passio* that has never been adequately explained; namely, why only a small group of catechumens were arrested, while other Christians, including the deacons Pomponius and Tertius, apparently came and went unhindered and unconcerned that they, too, might be arrested and condemned. Perhaps Perpetua and her companions could be construed as members of the New Prophecy, whose affiliation singled them, but not other Christians, out for prosecution. This hypothesis, however, has serious problems, not the least of which is its attempt to offer a historical explanation for a feature of a literary production.

Certain specific Christian characteristics may be deduced from the prison portion by itself, although these are not without problems. Manifestly obvious is the emphasis on martyrdom, while less remarked is a noteworthy absence of miracles suspending the natural order common to other second- and third-century Christian literature such as the Apocryphal Acts. Martyrdom appears to ensure immediate entrance to heaven, consistent with a view Tertullian himself attests. Although this is clearer in the vision of Saturus, it is also discernible in Perpetua's first vision, where she and Saturus ascend the ladder to heaven and are welcomed by the aged shepherd and the saints, a vision that, as many scholars have observed, appears grounded in the predictions of Revelation (e.g. 7:9–17). Implicit in this dream may be precisely the belief that Christians who die ordinary deaths cannot ascend into heaven until the second coming.

The prison portion affords little insight into authoritative and organizational church structures. The only church leaders mentioned are the two male deacons, unless perhaps we include the reference to Saturus as a teacher. No women leaders appear, nor do any male presbyters or bishops. Nevertheless, Perpetua's effective prayers for the salvation of her brother, Dinocrates, have led at least one scholar to suggest that she effectively held the rank of presbyter (Klawiter 1980). In this period, Christians awaiting martyrdom (confessors) were thought to have great powers, a perception expressed in the prison account at 4.1 and 9.1.⁴³ Among these powers was the ability to forgive those who had denied their faith under pressure. Since this power was otherwise arrogated to bishops and presbyters, the ability of confessors such as Perpetua to effect the forgiveness of others apparently entitled them to the equivalent ecclesiastical rank. Klawiter points out that since women as well as men were arrested in anticipation of martyrdom, the assignment of ministerial rank to confessors had the potential to enable women to attain offices otherwise prohibited.⁴⁴

Apart from her intercession for Dinocrates, Perpetua exercises no leadership within the prison account. In the separate vision of Saturus, Perpetua finds herself mediating a dispute between a presbyter and a bishop said to be those of her own church (although one might suggest that the presence of these officials represents a deliberate attempt to respond to the absence of such authorities in the prison narrative). In

the narration of the martyrdom itself, Perpetua twice intervened effectively with the Roman tribune, once to secure better treatment for the prisoners, and once to prevent them from having to wear the garments of the priests of Saturn and priestesses of Ceres (16.2–4; 18.4–6).

Seen through the multiple prismatic lenses supplied by the additional layers of the *Passio*, a fuller version of Perpetua's Christianity becomes visible, although whether it says more about the subsequent redactors than about any historical Perpetua remains an important question. The *Passio* as a whole attests a Christianity steeped in the cosmic framework of the Apocalypse of John, enamoured of martyrdom, apparently positioned at the end of time (although the language of the prologue seems ambivalent on this point when it predicts that 'these [new manifestations] will one day become ancient and needful for the ages to come').

CONCLUSION

By the fourth century, Perpetua's fame had spread beyond Carthage. Her image as martyred mother, unlike the Maccabean mother who exhorted her sons to martyrdom, uniquely exemplified the choice between the Roman family and the family of Christ, which was only paralleled in accounts of female asceticism. Whereas sexual abstinence had forced a wedge between Christian wives and non-Christian husbands, Perpetua's faith required her to give up her human father and son in exchange for a divine father and son (Tilley 1994: 839–40). The *Passio* shows how the conflict between Roman civic authority, which was mirrored microcosmically in the institution of the *domus*, and the church can be resolved in self-sacrifice, or death. As this political struggle dissipated, the story of Perpetua's martyrdom came to represent the rejection of whatever interpreters deemed to be less worthy. For these Latin interpreters, the choice of martyrdom symbolized obedience to those values represented by the Church.

In the fifth century, the remains of Perpetua and Felicitas were believed to be located in the main Basilica of Carthage, attested by both inscriptions and the comments of Victor Vitensis. Sixth-century cameo mosaics commemorate the martyrs in the church of Ravenna. As can be seen in Figure 36.6 of this volume, a photograph of The Perpetua window from Chester Cathedral,⁴⁵ these monuments suggest that independent of the historical details of Perpetua's death, her martyrdom was a powerful symbol and her story continued to be read, translated, edited, and interpreted by Christians in the East as well as in the West.

NOTES

- 1 Perpetua receives some notice in the writings of Tertullian: as discussed on p. 1051, it is unclear whether Tertullian knows the text of the martyrdom or some other version, oral or written, but in any case, he does not provide independent attestation of the life of either woman.
- 2 *Passio* 2.3. All citations of the text follow the edition of Amat (1996). English translations

- are generally our own. The standard English translation is that of Musurillo (1972: 106–31), reproduced in Kraemer (1988: 96–107).
- 3 Kraemer (1991), Rader (1981), Snyder (1989).
 - 4 E.g., Elm (forthcoming), Kraemer (1992), Maitland (1996), Miles (1989), Perkins (1995), Rader (1981), Salisbury (1997), Shaw (1993) and Tilley (1994).
 - 5 Amat thinks the text is ambiguous on this point: 'One of the two [brothers] is also a catechumen, the redactor tells us, but without specifying whether he was arrested or not' (1996: 31, our translation from the French).
 - 6 Text and French translation in Amat (1996).
 - 7 Amat (1996: 66), Barnes (1968b: 521), Dronke (1984: 1) and Fridh (1968: 80–3), who maintains the original of the Saturus vision was Greek.
 - 8 Robeck (1992: 13), Barnes (1968b: 523–5) and Shaw (1993: 3).
 - 9 Barnes (1968b: 522–3), Frend ([1978] 1993: 87), Dronke (1984: 1), Amat (1997: 20–1), LeClercq (1939: 421) and van Beek (1938: 3).
 - 10 Barnes (1968a: 40–1). For the opposite perspective, see Frend (1975).
 - 11 That Perpetua is not presented as having been killed in a wave of systematic persecution supports an earlier date, before the mid-third century, since the later persecutions were widespread.
 - 12 The editor of the *Passio* relates that the guard had received 'warnings from false witnesses (*homines uanissimos*)' about the prisoners (16.2), like Pliny's complaint that 'others who were named by the informer said that they were Christians and then denied it, explaining that they had been, but had ceased to be such, some three years ago' (*Ep.* 10.96; trans. H. M. Gwatkin in Stevenson 1987: 19).
 - 13 Other martyr traditions present alternative dynamics of persecution. For example, the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* presents the martyrdom of these six women and six men as essentially voluntary and initiated by the martyrs themselves. The proconsul Saturninus entreats the Christians to 'return to their senses [so that they might] obtain the pardon of our lord the emperor' (*Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* 2; trans. in Musurillo 1972: 87). Although Perpetua is not portrayed as an eager volunteer for martyrdom, the vague description of her arrest leaves open the possibility that she, like her predecessors, came forward to publicly bear witness.
 - 14 Roman prosopographies do not link the prenomen 'Minucius' with the nomen Timinianus: see Harris and Gifford (1890: 9). Hilarianus is also a common name for North African procurators. Only one version of the *Passio* contains the name Geta, which actually appears in the manuscript as 'ceta' (Amat 1996: 130). That this tradition is historically unreliable can be inferred from a note in the Latin historian Spartianus that Geta's birthday was in May, not February or March (Barnes 1968b: 523).
 - 15 Thurston and Attwater (1956: I, 493). Barnes' attempt to verify the authenticity of the eyewitness account of the *Passio* relies solely on Roman dates for Geta's birth. He never considers the lack of textual evidence for the Geta reference itself, or the problems of competing dates in other calendars and versions (1968b: 521–5).
 - 16 *Concilium Carthagensis* III.47, quoted in Delehaye (1912: 423, n. 3): *Ut praeter scripturas canonicas nihil in ecclesia legatur sub nomine divinarum scripturarum . . . Liceat etiam legi passiones martyrum quum anniversarii dies eorum celebrantur.*
 - 17 Augustine, *Sermo* 280.1. Since the moment of death was equivalent to second baptism, or rebirth into the Spirit, these days were called *dies natalis*. The custom of referring to the acts of saints and martyrs as *gesta* makes more explicit the parallel between the Christian commemorations and the Roman celebration of the emperors' birthdays. In his commentary on Psalms, Augustine cites the text as *The Passion of Blessed Perpetua* which 'we know and read' (*Enarrationes in Psalmos* 47.13).

- 18 Amat (1996: 271). The sermon is tentatively identified by Shewring as authentic Augustine, yet he admits 'Whether it may in fact be genuine I lack the competence to say' (1931: xxix).
- 19 Braun (1979: 105), Frend (1965: 363, 365), Fridh (1968: 9–10) and Harris and Gifford (1890: 8). It is presumptuous to suggest that Augustine and Pseudo-Augustine could have made a mistake in their sermons just after the text had been read aloud before their congregations.
- 20 Augustine, *Sermo* 281.3; trans. in Hill (1994). Subsequent quotations for Augustine's sermons are from this translation
- 21 For an English translation of the *Acts of (Paul and) Thecla*, see Kraemer (1988: 280–8); for a feminist commentary with helpful bibliography, see McGinn (1994).
- 22 Heffernan (1995: 315–25) and Habermehl (1992: 241–8), who raises concerns but ultimately does not resolve the question of the authenticity of the diary.
- 23 Dronke (1984: 1–17), Petroff (1986: 63) and Shaw (1993: 19).
- 24 See e.g. Shaw (1993), Dronke (1984) and Petroff (1986), all of whom argue for a distinctive female style.
- 25 Interestingly, the possessive *eorum* does occur in Tertullian's citation of these verses, which itself differs from other ancient attestations: *in novissimis temporibus effundam de Spiritu meo in omnem carnem et prophetabunt filii filiae que eorum et super servos et ancillas meas de meo Spiritus [sic?] effundam* (*Adversus Marcionem* 5.8).
- 26 For the thesis that she was not, see Poirier (1970). Neither Augustine nor Pseudo-Augustine nor Quodvultdeus describes Felicitas as a slave.
- 27 In a manner not unlike that Kugel (1990) argues for the rabbinic Joseph traditions, and Kraemer (1998) explores with regard to the Greek tales of Joseph and Aseneth. For the view that the citation of this passage represents self-conscious Montanist exegesis, see Atkinson (1982).
- 28 Examples of women's lives include the *Life of Macrina*, the *Life of Melania the Younger*, and the *Life of Olympias*.
- 29 See Shaw (1993: 10–11) for more detailed discussion of the issues such as the antiquity of the Vibii, whether or not they were of senatorial status, and so forth.
- 30 See again Shaw (1993: 10, esp. n. 28) for details; see also critical apparatus to 2.1 in Amat (1996: 104), and her commentary (pp. 192–3).
- 31 Snyder (1989), Kraemer (1991), Harris (1989) and Hallett (1999).
- 32 Shaw (1993: 12), citing Harris (1989) and Dronke (1984: 107–11).
- 33 Amat (1996: 32, 200) where she asks whether the *frater* is here Saturus, presumably because it is Saturus who appears in the requested vision. In 5.3, Perpetua's father implores her to think of her brothers (*aspice fratres tuos*) who will be devastated by her death. Were it not for the claim of the narrator that one of her brothers was a catechumen as well, we might read this to suggest that however many brothers she had they were not Christians, any more than her mother, aunt, or father were Christians.
- 34 On which, see Hallett (1984) and Kraemer (1993).
- 35 Shaw (1993), Elm (forthcoming) and Perkins (1995).
- 36 In 4.1, the 'brother' also addresses Perpetua as *domina soror*.
- 37 See Amat (1996: 193) for brief treatment of the possibility that *conserva* designates a spouse.
- 38 But see also the possibility discussed on p. 1056–7 that a desire to conform to the biblical citation of Joel 2:28–9/Acts 2:17–18 also affects the representation of Felicitas.
- 39 The chronology of Tertullian's life, including his period as a Montanist, is quite complex: for discussion, see Barnes (1971).
- 40 Ancient evidence is collected in Heine (1989) and Tabbernee (1997). For a recent

treatment, see Trevett (1996); for briefer overviews of the movement, particularly with reference to women, see Kraemer (1992: 157–73) and Elm (1994).

- 41 Epiphanius, *Panarion* 49.2; Kraemer (1992: 163–5).
- 42 An important study on this topic is Robeck (1992). Cf. Tabbernee (1997: 56–7).
- 43 According to Tertullian, Christians visited confessors to ask for intercessions of various sorts: adulterers and ‘fornicators’ flocked to those imprisoned to ask for absolution, bring with them food and drink for the martyrs, reminiscent of *Passio* 9.1 (*De pudicitia* [*On Modesty*] 22.1).
- 44 For further discussion of this, and of women’s leadership in early Christian churches, see Kraemer (1992: 174–98, esp. 179–81) and Cardman (1999).
- 45 Perpetua is even listed on the Syriac calendar, yet her co-martyr there is Saturnilus (‘I’ and ‘n’ are easily confused in Syriac), not Felicitas (W. Wright in Robinson 1891: 23).

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CONSTANTINE



Bill Leadbetter

INTRODUCTION

Constantine remains a figure of controversy. He is one of those people who seem by their personality, their acumen, and their ability both to take the opportunities offered and to leave the world markedly changed by their presence in it. He bequeaths a series of paradoxes: an autocrat who never ruled alone; a firm legislator for the Roman family, yet who slew his wife and eldest son and was, himself, illegitimate; a dynastic puppet-master, who left no clear successor; a soldier whose legacy was far more spiritual than temporal.

Constantine's origins

His origins lay within the ruling Roman military caste. By the late third century, the traditional Roman landed aristocracy had given way to a new class of men distinguished by their military merits. Constantine's father, Constantius, was one such. Of Pannonian origin (Aurelius Victor, *De Caesaribus* 39.26), he followed a career within the senior echelons of the army. One source lists his posts, in ascending order, as protector, tribune, governor of Dalmatia (*Origo Constantini imperatoris* 1.2). At some point during Constantius' rise through the senior ranks he acquired Helena, a concubine of humble origins (Leadbetter 1998b). In about 272, their son Constantine was born in the Pannonian town of Naissus, the modern Nish (Barnes 1982: 39–42).

If, as has been conjectured (Barnes 1982:36) Constantius' governorship of Dalmatia belonged to the reign of Carinus (283–5), then his support will have been critical to Diocletian, victor over Carinus in a civil war. The final battle in that war occurred at the Margus river, in a region adjacent to Constantius' own province. Diocletian's victory certainly brought Constantius within the small circle of those who really ruled the empire.

The dyarchy and the tetrarchy

Diocletian's accession to unchallenged power marked a change in the way in which the Roman world was ruled. Beset by pressure on the frontiers, separatist revolt, and

the pressing need for administrative change, he appointed a deputy with whom he formally shared power, thus creating the 'dyarchy' ('rule by two'). The person whom he appointed, Maximian, was another Pannonian military man (*Epitome de Caesaribus* 40.10). Diocletian was careful to preserve both the trappings and the reality of seniority (Leadbetter 1998c), but the junior emperor was still a formidable figure.

A cryptic passage in a panegyric to Maximian, delivered in 289, has led many scholars to accept that, by that time Constantius was Maximian's praetorian prefect (Barnes 1982: 37, 125f.; Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 70f.; Leadbetter 1998b: 75–7). The passage (*Panegyrici Latini* 10[2] 11.4) celebrates a marriage, in all likelihood the marriage of Constantius and Maximian's daughter Theodora. At this point, then, Constantius put his concubine aside for the sake of a highly advantageous dynastic match.

In 293, Diocletian expanded the imperial college still further. While he and Maximian retained their ranks as emperors of more senior status (*Augusti*) two deputies, each with the title of 'most noble (*nobilissimus*) Caesar', were appointed. This arrangement is referred to as the 'Tetrarchy' ('rule by four') and was commemorated in imperial statuary (see Chapter 10, and Figures 10.1, 10.2). Diocletian's deputy was his own son-in-law, Galerius. Maximian's was Constantius. The principal task for the Caesars was to assert imperial authority on the frontiers and win back separatist regions. As generals they were extremely successful. Constantius recaptured Britain from the separatist emperors Carausius and Allectus; Galerius shattered the power of Rome's ancient enemy, Persia.

Constantine's early career

Like his father, Constantine pursued a military career. He was assisted by his father's rank, but all of his early military service was in the armies of Galerius and Diocletian (Barnes 1982: 41f.). While it is legitimate to conjecture that he was hostage for his father's loyalty during this period, he was also an active and valiant warrior. He was in the army of Galerius which invaded Persia, and fought with distinction against Sarmatian bands on the Danube frontier. Soon afterwards, he was transferred to Diocletian's personal staff, where he served until 305.

In May 305, Diocletian and Maximian abdicated. Diocletian's abdication was voluntary (although it followed upon a long illness); Maximian was less willing, but he complied with his senior colleague's wishes. Both retired to country houses, Diocletian to the cultivation of his garden (*Epitome de Caesaribus* 39.6). They were succeeded by their deputies: Constantius replaced Maximian and Galerius took the place of Diocletian. Constantius, however, was the senior of the two, and his name appears first in inscriptions of the period. One source suggests that it was expected that the new Caesars would be Constantine and Maxentius, the son of Maximian (Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* 18.8). Instead, they were Maximin Daia and Severus, both men loyal to Galerius.

Galerius had benefited immensely from the transfer of power. While he could not inherit Diocletian's formal seniority, he sought to exercise Diocletian's station. Constantius, for his part, seems to have accepted the situation. It may be that he had

no desire to risk open conflict with Galerius; it may be that he was mindful that Constantine was now posted to the court of Galerius. Constantius certainly sent to Galerius, asking that his son be returned to him (Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* 23.3–4; *Origo Constantini imperatoris* 2.2). Galerius, unable to decline such a request, acceded, and Constantine returned to his father's side in time to accompany him on campaign against the Picts (*Panegyrici Latini* 6[7]7.5). On 25 July, 306, however, Constantius died and Constantine was proclaimed emperor by the troops in York (for the dates, see Barnes 1982: 61).

CONSTANTINE THE POLITICIAN

Constantine did not immediately set himself up as a rival to Galerius. Rather, he preferred to accept Galerius' verdict. His opportunism was swiftly imitated. In late October 306, Maximian's son Maxentius, then resident in Rome, was proclaimed emperor by the remnants of the Praetorian Guard still resident there. He was careful to claim no title, striking coins instead as *princeps* rather than *Augustus* or *Caesar* (Cullhed 1994, 32–4). This did not suffice to appease Galerius, who might reward audacity when there was an imperial vacancy to fill, but would not countenance disloyalty otherwise. Severus, Constantius' successor in the West, marched against



Figure 42.1 Head of Constantine from the Basilica of Constantine in Rome. Photo J. C. N. Coulston.

the rebel, who sat securely behind the walls of Rome. Maxentius called upon his father for aid. Maximian had commanded the troops now serving under Severus, and it was a simple matter for him to recall them to their old loyalty. Deserted by his army, Severus fled to Ravenna, where he was handed over to Maximian and compelled to abdicate (Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* 26.6–11; *Origo Constantini Imperatoris* 3.6–4.10). The vacancy which Maxentius required had been created, but not in any way calculated to endear him to Galerius. The senior emperor himself now marched on the rebel, but with only marginally more success. Galerius escaped from Italy with his life and his army, but Maxentius still remained, unscathed, behind the walls of Rome.

Maxentius' successful revolt was a piece of extraordinary good fortune for Constantine. It reintroduced Maximian into the affairs of the empire, and robbed effective control of the West from Galerius, thus effectively leaving Constantine a free hand in his own lands. Constantine used his opportunity to cement his position through dynastic arrangements of his own. He had previously enjoyed a relationship with a concubine, Minervina, who had borne him a son, Crispus (*Epitome de Caesaribus* 41.4), Zosimus (*New History* 2.20.2) and Zonaras (13.2.37) all call Minervina a concubine. There is no reason to dispute their testimony, although Jones *et al.* (1971: 602–3) suggest otherwise. This was now put aside for a grand match.

As the armies of Galerius trudged wearily eastwards in the winter on 307, a grand celebration was taking place in Gaul. Constantine was marrying Maximian's daughter Fausta. An orator celebrated the occasion in a panegyric, which also noted a further development. Constantine accepted promotion to the rank of Augustus from the hands of Maximian (*Panegyrici Latini* 7[6]5.3). Constantine's claim to the rank was attractive and plausible. Following the death of Severus there was no Augustus in the West; Constantine had been his Caesar and so therefore next in line. It was also confirmed by the one who had bestowed the rank of Augustus upon Constantine's father. This last point was not lost on the panegyrist who made much of it.

The promotion was, however, in open defiance of Galerius, who claimed the right to nominate Severus' successor. In order to add lustre to his decisions, he nominated himself and the retired Diocletian as consuls for the following year (308) and summoned an imperial conference at Carnuntum in Pannonia. Diocletian's presence added due weight to its deliberations. He prevailed upon Maximian to return to private life; the two, together with Galerius, nominated a new Augustus for the West, Licinius, an old friend and ally of Galerius (*Origo Constantini imperatoris* 5.13). Constantine was not rejected from this scheme; instead, he retained the insignia of Caesar.

This arrangement was hardly satisfactory to Constantine, who ignored the decision of Carnuntum and retained the title of Augustus. He was, after all, the effective ruler of Britain, Gaul and Spain. His nominal superior, Licinius, controlled a patch of Pannonia, and had the task of recovering Italy and Africa from Maxentius. Constantine also took his responsibilities seriously. When not engaged in high politics, he was on campaign (Barnes 1982:70). In 310, Maximian, excluded from power by Maxentius and reduced to the pathetic status of vexatious mendicant, sought to depose Constantine. The coup was ludicrous; the aged Augustus, its only casualty, was forced to suicide. Constantine's condign treatment of his father-in-law illus-

trates the limits of his *pietas*. Another panegyric, delivered in Autun in 310, sets out the official version (Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 237–43).

The panegyrist of 310 was also entrusted to deploy a hitherto undisclosed fact about Constantine's family. In praising the emperor, he also praises his ancestry: not merely his father Constantius, but also more remote antecedents. A link is drawn between Constantine and the emperor Claudius II Gothicus, a hero of the Roman recovery, mythologized for the defeat of a Gothic horde and premature death from plague (*Panegyrici Latini* 6[7]2; Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 219; Syme 1974). Although the precise nature of Constantine's kinship with Claudius is never elucidated by the panegyrist, it is nevertheless clear that a new shot in a propaganda war has been fired.

Hitherto, Constantine had rested his claims to legitimacy as much upon his recognition by Galerius and Constantine as upon his proclamation by Constantius' army in 306. He now cast aside the mantle of tetrarch, and seized that of dynast. One reason for his change of strategy may well have lain with Galerius. The senior Augustus had already begun making plans for his retirement. A palatial villa was being constructed for him at Romuliana, the place of his birth (Srejavic *et al.* 1983; Srejavic 1985, 1992/3). Lactantius states that he had already commenced amassing state resources for the celebration of his *vicennalia* (Lactantius *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* 31.2). This year-long celebration of his accomplishment and longevity was due to commence in March 312 and conclude with his abdication 12 months later.

Constantine was probably therefore preparing the ground for his own claim to seniority within the empire. If so, then his anticipation was rewarded when Galerius died prematurely in May 311. No successor was proclaimed. Rather, Licinius and Maximinus partitioned the territories which he had occupied: Licinius ruled in the Balkan provinces; Maximinus in Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt; Constantine in Britain, Gaul and Spain; Maxentius in Africa and Italy. Whereas Diocletian's tetrarchs had been united by patronage and their loyalty to the senior ruler, this group of four was divided by mutual suspicion and rivalry.

War with Maxentius

Images of Maxentius have largely been crafted by Constantine's propagandists. From them emerges the picture of a greedy and wanton ruler who dabbled in the magic arts. But Maxentius was not so wicked. He was a conscientious ruler who retained the loyalty of his troops. He tolerated Christianity, although he also exiled two popes whose elections had occasioned disorder (Cullhed 1994: 72–3). Constantine, however, felt the need to blacken his memory, in all likelihood because the war which he waged against Maxentius was unprovoked.

In the summer of 312, Constantine invaded Italy. His army defeated a large force led by Maxentius' general, Pompeianus, at Verona, and then marched on Rome. Maxentius, responsive to criticism from within Rome, abandoned his earlier policy of sitting behind Rome's mighty walls and subverting his opponent's army. Instead, he marched out to oppose Constantine. The armies met in battle at the still extant Milvian Bridge, outside Rome.

Eusebius, writing in his *Life of Constantine* (composed soon after the emperor's death in 337), states that Constantine himself had told him that one afternoon before this battle while marching with his army he saw with his own eyes, as did all his army, a cross of light written in the sky, together with the words 'In this conquer'. The following night Christ appeared to him in a vision with the sign seen in the sky and told him to make a copy of it to serve as his standard in war. Next day Constantine summoned his craftsmen and produced such a standard, consisting of a tall pole and a cross-bar, with the now familiar chi-rho monogram ☩ (symbolizing Jesus Christ, chi and rho being the first two letters of *Christos*) embellished with gold and jewels at the top of the pole, and a banner carrying the image of Constantine hanging from the cross-bar. Thus was created the famous *Labarum*. Constantine also had his soldiers paint the *chi-rho* monogram on their shields. Under this sign his army conquered (Jones 1972: 98–101).

Maxentius was defeated. Thousands of his men drowned in the Tiber as they were forced back by Constantine's army. Fleeing across the bridge with a large crowd, Maxentius himself was pushed into the river and drowned (Jones 1972: 83). Rome, Italy and Africa were now Constantine's. His subsequent triumphal entry into Rome is celebrated on the Arch of Constantine later erected in the city (see Figure 42.2).

THE CONVERSION OF CONSTANTINE

The question of the conversion of Constantine has continued to excite controversy. Its authenticity has been questioned and asserted with equal ferocity. The degree of vigour with which the partisans of either side (e.g. Kerestzes 1981; Kee 1982) have approached this question is enduring testimony to the historical significance of the religious policies embarked upon by Constantine. Despite attempts to demonstrate otherwise, the nature of Constantine's personal religious beliefs will always be a mystery precisely because they remained private. What does matter, however, is the way in which Constantine came to frame a religious policy which did more than merely tolerate Christianity.

Immediately following his defeat of Maxentius, Constantine confirmed his policy of toleration in an edict issued from Rome in which he ordered the cessation of persecution everywhere (Corcoran 1996: 187). This order was principally directed at Maximinus, who initially complied. Some months afterwards, Constantine met with Licinius in the city of Milan. There, the alliance between the two was sealed by the marriage of Licinius to Constantine's sister Constantia (Pohlsander 1993). They also produced a document, 'The Edict of Milan', which was enforced in the territory which they ruled directly. This granted universal toleration and the restitution of all Christian property.

Licinius' new-found toleration of Christianity was one substantial policy difference which he had with Maximinus, who had recommenced a persecution which he had been reluctant to abandon in the first place (Castritius 1969: 63–86; Mitchell 1988: 115; Nicholson 1991). Other counsels prevailed. Before a blow was struck in the war between the two, Maximinus ordered the toleration of Christianity in terms identical with those of the Edict of Milan (Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 9.10.7–11;

Corcoran 1996: 152, 188). It did not help him. Before the two armies of Maximinus and Licinius met in battle at Adrianople, that of Licinius recited a prayer to 'the supreme God', the words of which were (according to the emperor) dictated to him in a dream by an angel. The battle necessarily took on a religious dimension; Licinius, the champion of 'the supreme God' was challenging Maximinus, publicly zealous for the traditional deities. In this religious trial by combat, Licinius was victorious and Maximinus fled to Tarsus and there took his own life. Licinius was the master of the East; the last vestiges of persecution eradicated.

Licinius' alliance with Constantine guaranteed peace for the Christians under his direct rule. He expressed a degree of appreciation for the faith which Constantine favoured. His wife was Christian and places were found for bishops at his court (Pohlsander 1993: 156–7). The political relationship between the two was uneasy, however. A war broke out in 316 and Licinius was defeated, losing most of his European possessions to Constantine. It was only after this that Licinius revived a policy of hostility towards the Christians. He only slowly became an active persecutor, instead preferring to cancel legal privileges which Christians had gained and regulate the affairs of the churches (Barnes 1981: 70–1). Licinius sought to suppress the churches in his last years, when his confrontation with Constantine had become intolerable. No doubt he feared the Christians as the fifth column of his rival and acted accordingly. Licinius' anti-Christian measures then became the substantive cause of the final war between himself and Constantine, who was, no doubt, glad of the excuse which they provided for him (Barnes 1981: 72–3). In 324, Licinius was defeated and deposed by Constantine. The empire was now united under his authority. Persecution had gasped itself out and the Constantinian church reigned triumphant.

CONSTANTINE AND THE CHURCH

Introduction

When Constantine entered Rome in October 312, he brought with him an entirely new approach to Christianity. His predecessors had been hostile or ambivalent. He became an active patron and benefactor. In so doing, he was not careless of the sensitivities of those in the empire who were not Christians. Constantine was not a crass triumphalist. In the city of Rome itself, the only image of him which referred to the new faith was the great statue in the basilica which bore his name (see Figure 42.1). This statue depicted him holding the *Labarum*, his own symbol of Christianity (see p. 1074). Otherwise he expressed a dutiful traditionalism. The inscription on his triumphal arch in Rome refers coyly to 'the divinity' (*Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* 694 = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 6. 1139). For five years or more after his victory at the Milvian Bridge his coinage retained traditional pagan images, such as Hercules the Victorious, Mars the Destroyer, Jupiter the Preserver and, above all, Sol Invictus, 'the Unconquered Sun' (Jones 1972: 97; Bruun 1966: 61–4), which also features on his triumphal arch (see Figure 42.2).

These ought not to be taken as uncertainty in Constantine's own mind or policy.



Figure 42.2 Relief of Constantine's triumphal entry into Rome, from the Arch of Constantine, showing Sol Invictus over the emperor and also in a chariot. Photo J. C. N. Coulston.

It was mere courtesy to the considerable numbers of people in the empire with different religious beliefs. Taken as a whole, Constantine's actions make his preference for Christianity perfectly clear. This is most clearly seen in the nature of some of his legislation; his patronage of the church, which was on a vast scale; and his involvement in its internal disputes, particularly the Donatist and Arian schisms. Christians in turn made their own preference for Constantine clear. A new theology of empire emerged which exalted the Christian emperor, a development with which Constantine was pleased to cooperate.

Legislative acts

Constantine's patronage of Christianity was expressed soon after his victory over Maxentius through a series of legislative acts. There is evidence of imperial subsidy of the church and the exemption of Christian clergy from civic duties as early as 313 (Eusebius, *H. E.* 10.6, 7). These acts of favour towards the church reflect a general policy of legitimization of it by Constantine. Because the Christians had hitherto formed a fringe or clandestine community, the church had no clear public role. Throughout his legislation, Constantine sought to provide such a role. The exemption of clergy from civic duties, already flagged in a letter to the governor of Africa, was made more explicit in later mandates (*Theodosian Code* 16.2.1, 2). Such directives encouraged the view that bishops and other clergy were already, by virtue of their

office, men in public life. The Christian congregation, too, found a place in law. Slaves could now be manumitted by declaration before a gathering, in the presence of a bishop (*Theodosian Code* 4.7.1; 2.8.1; *Code of Justinian* 1.13.1); episcopal courts were given official legal status (*Code of Justinian* 1.27.1; *Sirmondian Constitutions* 1); clergy became exempt from taxation (*Theodosian Code* 16.2.10); and the Christian day of worship (Sunday) declared a day of rest (*Code of Justinian* 3.12.2). Moreover, Constantine removed one legal impediment to Christian practice when he rescinded the old Augustan penalties against celibacy and childlessness (*Theodosian Code* 8.16.1) and sought to privilege Christians over Jews for the first time.

Constantine's legislation pertaining to the Jews of the empire is most revealing of the degree to which he favoured Christianity. While relieving Christian clergy of curial duty, for example, he reversed an ancient principle and ordered that Jews should now be subject to nomination to town councils (*Theodosian Code* 16.8.3; Lindner 1987: 120–4). Moreover, he ordained that Jews be restrained from attacking members of their communities who converted to Christianity (*Theodosian Code* 16.8.1; *Code of Justinian* 1.9.3; Lindner 1987: 124–32; *Sirmondian Constitutions* 4; Lindner 1987: 138–44). These laws are not as innocuous as they might appear. They provide legal privileges for Christians and remove traditional privileges enjoyed by Jews.

The most controversial question relating to Constantine's legislation is that relating to traditional sacrifice. Eusebius makes a remark to the effect that Constantine abolished it altogether (*Life of Constantine* 2.45). This statement has been variously believed and disbelieved (Barnes 1981: 210–12; Drake 1983: 462–6). Endeavours to harmonize the evidence have been offered (Errington 1988; Bradbury 1994). Certainly if Constantine ever did forbid traditional sacrifice, such an order was never enforced during his lifetime. Constantine's abhorrence of blood sacrifice, however, is clear from his own statements. His preference for Christian governors ensured that the public sacrifices normally performed by imperial officials would be discontinued (Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 2.44; Bradbury 1994: 129–30).

Constantine as imperial patron

The most obvious and enduring consequence of Constantine's patronage of the Christian church is in the monumental construction of vast new buildings for public gathering and worship. Christians had not developed a singular architecture for their public buildings for the simple reason that they did not have many. Those which they did possess were, by and large, private dwellings converted for the purpose like the third-century church building at Dura-Europos (Krautheimer 1965: 4–8). There are 25 known pre-Constantinian Christian communities in Rome (Kirsch 1935; Lampe 1989). They are known from the names (or *tituli*) of the apartment houses, in which they worshipped and which they probably owned. In all likelihood, they were confiscated by the state during the Great Persecution. Constantine unconditionally restored all Christian property very soon after his victory over Maxentius (Eusebius, *H. E.* 10.2. 15–17).

It may have been less than two weeks after the battle of the Milvian Bridge that Constantine took a further step, donating to the church an imperial villa on the

outskirts of Rome (Krautheimer 1979: 89–90; 1983: 13–15). Constantine's gift was not, however, of a mere house. Out of its old buildings, and sprawling into the gardens, there slowly arose the great hall which we know today as St John Lateran. Across the Tiber, in the Vatican fields, the entire side of a hill was levelled, the spoil tumbling into, and filling up, a gully in which a pagan cemetery was located. Also in that gully was the shrine upon which the new church was constructed: the presumed grave of St Peter (Toynbee and Ward-Perkins 1956). Elsewhere in Rome at the Sessorian Palace, Constantine's mother Helena resided, with her precious relic, a piece of the True Cross from Jerusalem. This in turn became another great Constantinian basilica, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. The shrine of St Lawrence too received imperial attention. The deacon who, legend had it, had been executed at the order of the emperor Valerian, had a tomb beyond the walls of Aurelian. Like the bones of St Peter, those of St Lawrence were the object of particular veneration by Rome's Christians. A great basilica soon arose over his grave, to attract pilgrims and worshippers to partake of his sanctity.

Temple-building had always been a major feature of imperial euergetism. When Constantine ordered the construction of the new Christian basilicas within Rome itself he was extending imperial beneficence to the new faith. It certainly accorded the Christian church a status which it had never possessed before, and permitted it to express a new grandeur of display in ritual and self-advertisement.

It was a cautious kind of euergetism, concentrating upon the outskirts of the city of Rome itself, and upon Christianity's holiest sites. Upon the site of Helena's discovery of the True Cross, now interpreted as the place where both the Crucifixion and Resurrection occurred, there was constructed a grand new Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre. Likewise, at Bethlehem, the church of the Holy Nativity was built around the supposed scene of Christ's birth. These grand basilicas neatly annexed to the empire the sacred stories which lie at the heart of the Christian gospel: the narratives of Jesus himself, and of his apostles and those who died for the faith.

Such properties were maintained by a generous endowment (Janes 1998: 54–6). The *Liber Pontificalis*, an early chronicle of the papacy, lists an extraordinary amount of property which Constantine donated to the church. The well of Constantine's financial generosity to the various sees was both deep and wide. In taking on the role of imperial patron of the church, however, Constantine also necessarily involved himself in its internal disputes.

Moreover, the level of imperial generosity made the price of schism necessarily high. It was now not merely the fracturing of the Christian community, but also the consequent privileging of one segment of that community over the other, since one received imperial largesse and the other did not. It also forced the emperor into the role of arbiter and judge of doctrine, a role which Constantine did not assume with any degree of comfort.

Constantine's new city

Although Constantine embellished Rome with great cathedrals, perhaps the most enduring of his architectural legacies lay on the Bosphorus. There, after the defeat of Licinius in 324, he laid the foundations of a new city – Constantinople. This was to

be a Christian city, uncontaminated by pagan cult or tradition (Barnes 1981: 212). Constantine, at first, did not spend much time in his new foundation. Over the following years, he preferred to base himself at Nicomedia while his newest city was being constructed. Occasionally he made tours of inspection, but it was not until 330, when the city was formally dedicated, that he finally based himself there (Dagron 1974: 33; Barnes 1982: 69, 75–8). The city which he created was embellished with art plundered from Greece, and was endowed with a hippodrome, baths, and a Senate house (Dagron 1974: 36–7; Krautheimer 1983: 45–50). No temples were built by Constantine, however. Rather, a series of great churches were constructed, the most notable being the Church of the Holy Wisdom – a vast and lofty basilica attached to the imperial palace (Krautheimer 1983: 50–5). This landmark cathedral was located in the ceremonial heart of the new city. It proclaimed the solid institutional identification between emperor and church.

The only church in the city which was completed during Constantine's lifetime was of equal significance. The Church of the Holy Apostles (*Apostoleion*) was endowed with memorials of all 12 apostles, and was intended to be Constantine's tomb (Krautheimer 1983: 55–60). There he would lie as the thirteenth and last of the messengers of God.

When Constantine founded this city, it was less to found the new capital of the empire than to found a new capital. Rome had long ceased to be the centre of the imperial world. Rather, the capital was where the emperor was (Millar 1977: 15–53). But he certainly intended this to be a great city. He attracted a population there through great incentives, according to one critic stripping neighbouring cities bare of people (Eunapius, *Lives of the Sophists* 462). He endowed a senatorial class. But this senatorial class was not equivalent to their venerable western colleagues. Their titles and entitlements differed. This new town was, however, constructed in Constantine's image. As such, it became the metropolitan city of the Christian empire – simultaneously a museum of the pagan past and an aggressive assertion of the Christian future.

Constantine and Christian dissent

The Donatist controversy

Constantine's involvement in the doctrinal and disciplinary affairs of the church commenced with an appeal for his intervention in the Donatist dispute. This was not without precedent. In 270, over forty years before Christians were to win religious toleration, a dispute over the tenure of the see of Antioch led to an appeal to the judgement of the emperor Aurelian. On that occasion, Aurelian had referred the appellants to the bishop of Rome (Eusebius, *H. E.* 7.30.19–21). On this occasion, the Donatists appealed to Constantine to rule in their dispute with Caecilian. Constantine followed the precedent of Aurelian in referring the matter to Miltiades, the bishop of Rome (Eusebius, *H. E.* 10.5.18).

Miltiades' response was to call a wider council of bishops to Rome to resolve the matter. They judged in favour of Caecilian, and the response of the Donatists was, again, to appeal to the judgement of Constantine. Constantine ordered a council of

bishops to be held at Arles, a city in which he was sometimes resident, in order to hear the appeal. The Donatists again lost their suit, and sought a third time for Constantine's intervention. Somewhat exasperated by their persistence, Constantine finally relented and himself took a stand, rejecting the Donatist appeal and aligning himself firmly with the previous judgements of Miltiades and the Council of Arles.

Constantine's involvement in the Donatist dispute had been unwilling, forced by the intransigence of the Donatists themselves. Nevertheless, it taught him a valuable lesson about the relationship between himself and the Christians. When the next controversy arose, his approach was far more interventionist.

The Arian controversy

For some years, a dispute had been brewing between two Alexandrian clergy about the nature of the godhead. A presbyter, Arius, who had been a student of Lucian of Antioch, asserted a theological view which emphasized the transcendence of the Father, and within which the Son was conceived of as a subsequent and therefore neither co-eternal nor co-valent with the Father. Arius was a popular preacher whose views found ready acceptance, both within his own community in Alexandria and also within the wider Christian world. He also encountered considerable opposition, not the least from his own bishop, Alexander.

When Constantine took control of the Eastern provinces, after the final defeat of Licinius in 324, he was presented with this controversy. Unlike the Donatist schism, this was over a matter of theological doctrine rather than church order. Constantine's first instinct was to seek to negotiate an agreement between the disputants. Accordingly, he sent Ossius of Cordova, his theological adviser, to Alexandria to mediate a solution. With him, Ossius took a letter from Constantine which characterized the whole matter a triviality; an inconsequential conflict over an unnecessary question. He urged forbearance and forgiveness (Eusebius *Life of Constantine* 2.63–72).

For the participants, however, such a dispute had far greater weight than mere philosophical hair-splitting. Neither could simply beg to differ. Ossius himself sought to resolve the conflict by resort to church order: Alexander was bishop; Arius a presbyter who owed him obedience. A subsequent gathering of bishops in Antioch likewise supported episcopal authority over priestly inspiration. At this council three of Arius' sympathizers, including Eusebius of Caesarea, were excommunicated (Barnes 1981: 213–14). Their excommunication was temporary and was to be reviewed at a council which was determined would be held later in the year at Ancyra. In the event, no such council was called. Constantine, perhaps dismayed by the failure of the bishops to agree amongst themselves, intervened and called a council at Nicaea.

Constantine at Nicaea

Nicaea was the most comprehensive church council called to that point, with representatives from all parts of the empire, and also from dioceses outside the empire. Constantine's patronage of the Council was apparent from its inception. The bishops were transported, housed and fed at public expense. The sessions were not held in an

ecclesiastical building but on imperial property, in a structure described by Eusebius as a 'palace'. In its initial session, Constantine addressed the bishops, exhorting them to reach agreement. When he withdrew, Ossius of Cordova assumed the role of president of the Council. Although Constantine was never formally a member of the Council, his stamp was upon it, and all of the participants were aware of his own determination to reach a satisfactory settlement.

In this, he seems to have been let down. As with the Donatists, Constantine was disappointed by the incapacity of the bishops to reach an agreement. In his various interventions, Constantine himself sought to be an eirenic voice for moderation. Final resolution upon a credal statement, however, could only be enforced by Constantine's own insistence that it would be the final word on the matter, and dissent meant exile.

Following the transaction of further ecclesiastical business, the Council wound up at a grand banquet to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of Constantine's accession to power. It was a remarkable occasion, in which Constantine's alliance with the church was proclaimed to the world at large, and its price to episcopal participants who dined surrounded by the armed guards who enforced the imperial will.

CONSTANTINE AND THE EMPIRE

Constantine's reforms

Constantine's adoption and championing of Christianity affected much of the imperial policy which he pursued. While many of his administrative reforms do not appear, at least overtly, to be Christian, it was impossible for Constantine not to nuance them somehow in favour of the church. Military chaplains appeared, for example, for the first time (Jones 1953); Christians were preferred for administrative posts; bishops were entrusted with juridical responsibilities.

In general, Constantine continued the tenor of administrative reform commenced by Diocletian. An enduring achievement was the stabilization of the coinage. The standard silver coinage had become heavily debased in the course of the third century, and Diocletian's attempt to re-tariff it had not been completely successful. In producing a high denomination standard coinage, Constantine abandoned silver and instead struck a gold coinage (the *solidus*) which became a highly prized and stable means of storing and transferring value (Jones 1964: 107–9). Within the structure of the imperial administration, he created new offices and orders which completed a process, begun in the time of Augustus, of the transformation of the emperor's private household into a stratified, hierarchical imperial court.

He also made changes to the structure of the army. Significantly, he supplemented its numbers by recruitment from outside the empire. Constantine's later pagan critic Zosimus charged him with barbarizing the army (*New History* 2.34). While the charge is exaggerated and rhetorical, it is certainly true that in the generations which immediately followed even senior commanders could be drawn from the ranks of non-Roman communities. The static arrangements of the first two

imperial centuries had been slowly dispensed with. Between them, Diocletian and Constantine remodelled the imperial army so that it was, in essence, two forces. There were troops on permanent garrison duty (the *limitanei*), who acted as a police and intelligence service. Then there were the mobile field armies (*comitatenses*), flexible enough to act as a defensive force when occasion arose, and as an offensive force without denuding the garrisons of necessary troops. This arrangement has been called 'defence in depth' by one military historian (Luttwak 1976: 127–90), although this thesis has been (properly) criticized by subsequent scholars (notably Isaac 1992: 372–418). It was not always a defensive arrangement.

Constantine's wars

Constant campaigning on the frontiers by Constantine and his predecessors had created a measure of peace and security. The necessity for such skirmishing continued in his later years. Campaigns are attested against Danubian peoples (particularly the Sarmatians: Barnes 1982: 75–9, 258). Towards the end of his reign, he mounted a successful campaign in Dacia (modern Transylvania), in which he claimed to have recovered territory which had been given up in the time of Aurelian (Julian, *The Caesars* 329b–d; Barnes 1982: 80).

Relations with the great rival empire of Sassanid Persia were less successful. When Armenia became a Christian nation, Rome's position in the East was strengthened. Some time later, he received Hormisdas, a Sassanid prince, as a refugee from the rule of the Great King, Shapur II. At some point, he personally wrote a letter to Shapur, asserting a role as protector of Shapur's Christian subjects (Barnes 1985: 130–3). War between the two states broke out during the last years of Constantine's reign. Persian troops invaded Armenia and expelled its Christian king. Constantine responded by making his own disposition for the rule of Armenia: his nephew Hannibalianus was proclaimed as its king, and an army was sent under his son Constantius to enforce this claim (*Epitome de Caesaribus* 41.20; *Origo Constantini imperatoris* 6.35). The initial campaigning was a success. Constantius drove the Persians from the key fortress town of Amida, and in the course of the fighting Narses, another of Shapur II's brothers, was slain (Dodgeon and Lieu 1991: 153–5). Emboldened by success, Constantine was preparing a further assault when he was overtaken by illness and died in May 337. His death left the Persian War as a long and bloody inheritance for his successors.

Constantine's dynasty

Constantine's family was a large one. His father's marriage to Theodora had produced six children, three of whom (his sisters) were deployed in dynastic matches (Barnes 1982: 37). His half-brothers, on the other hand, he preferred to keep away from the centre of power (Leadbetter 1998b: 80). Julian complained that this was at the behest of Constantine's mother who wished to see her own grandchildren exalted (Libanius, *Oration* 14.30). Like his father, Constantine fathered a son by a concubine. Minervina, the mother of his oldest son Crispus, is described in a number of sources as Constantine's concubine (Jones *et al.* 1971: 602–3). Crispus himself was a bright

and engaging prince. Tutored by Lactantius himself, he was raised to the rank of Caesar in 317, and played an active role in Constantine's victory over Licinius in 324 (Jones *et al.* 1971: 233). Shortly after, however, he was executed, probably a victim of the clumsy intrigues of his stepmother Fausta. Soon afterwards, she too was executed (Jones *et al.* 1971: 326).

The death of Crispus, together with the relegation of Constantine's half-brothers, left the succession clear for Constantine's sons by Fausta. There were three of these, Constantine, Constantius and Constans (Barnes 1982: 43). Each of these was raised to the rank of Caesar in the lifetime of their father: Constantine in 317, Constantius in 324 and Constans in 333 (Barnes 1982: 7–8; Kienast 1990: 305, 307, 309). In 335, however, Constantine complicated this neat arrangement. His nephew Flavius Dematius was raised to the rank of Caesar also (Kienast 1990: 303). This, together with the new prominence of Constantius I's children, occasioned a succession crisis after the death of Constantine. The consequence was a long interregnum. Uncertainty was only resolved by the intervention of the army, which proclaimed Constantine's sons his legitimate successors and killed everyone else.

Constantine never ruled alone. He successfully safeguarded his own position through the deployment of members of his family as nominal colleagues. While this was of great political benefit to Constantine, it left an ambiguous legacy. His sons came to rule after his death through violence rather than a peaceful transition. Their own relationship was marked by mutual suspicion. In 340, Constantine was eliminated by Constans, who was in turn removed by a usurper. Constantius II, himself childless was forced to turn to the two surviving grandsons of Constantius I. Of these, he executed one (Gallus), while the other rebelled against him (Julian). Julian's own reign was ephemeral. His death in 363 marks the end of a dynasty which had, only one generation previously, been richly populated.

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ANTHONY OF THE DESERT



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WHOSE ANTHONY?

We are beginning to let go of our assumption that we can recover ‘history’ as if it were something awaiting discovery by the proper tools. In the case of someone like Anthony, it is harder to surrender our desire to know about the ‘real’ person. However, written documents cannot resuscitate historical figures. Once pen was put to papyrus a gap opened between the subject and the resulting text, reflecting the interval of perspective between observer and observed. Therefore no form of narrative is immune from the distorting effects, benign or insidious, of characterization. When the subject is famous, immensely famous, like Anthony, and the literary portraits are numerous, the approach becomes very tricky indeed. The ‘quest for the historical Anthony’ has consumed students of monasticism just as their colleagues in New Testament studies have circled round and round in their quest for another, and even more famous, maker – and product – of history.

We can be confident on the basis of many written sources, and of so many different kinds, that Anthony was a major, even dominant, presence in early fourth-century Egyptian monasticism. Although texts may not resuscitate, they do propagate, and it was Anthony’s fortune not only to *be* great but also to have a masterful and highly placed biographer intent on keeping him so. The *Life of Anthony* (hereafter ‘*Life*’) written by the controversial bishop Athanasius of Alexandria within a year of the monk’s death at his retreat in the Eastern desert, has been the most successful and widely imitated hagiographical text of all time. It evoked competition from Jerome, who wrote a rival *Life of Paul the First Hermit*. It prompted Augustine’s crisis of conversion when he heard of the spiritual triumphs of an uneducated Copt. The *Life* inspired remarkable paintings by Bosch, Breughel and others. Breughel’s version sparked the literary imagination of the nineteenth-century French novelist Gustave Flaubert, who in his *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* took it upon himself to supplement the dialogue provided by the more discreet Athanasius. Anthony provoked scorn from Gibbon but fascinated other scholars, who have not ceased from producing study after study about him, especially in the last century and a half. What is perhaps most remarkable is that Anthony’s life and teaching, however mediated, remain an inspiration to men and women claiming to

follow him in the monastic life. This monk, and the traditions surrounding him, must indeed be reckoned with.

PRINCIPAL SOURCES

Athanasius' portrait of Anthony has been the most important one for both monastic audiences and other readers. The longest and most detailed account, it is the predictable mix of factual information gathered from those who knew Anthony, idealized scenarios about Anthony's life and teaching, and Athanasius' own agenda. The question of authorship has been settled in Athanasius' favour, though without excluding the possibility that he worked with some earlier documents about Anthony (Brakke 1994; Bartelink 1994: 27–42). He certainly wrote with earlier literary models in mind, establishing Anthony as a Christian (and superior) counterpart to the philosopher-heroes whose biographies circulated widely in the Hellenistic world.

Opinions vary, however, about the reliability of Athanasius' version of Anthony and his teaching. Attempts have been made to test the *Life* by checking its data against other extant information about Anthony (Rubenson 1995: 126–91). As is generally the case with such assessments, the peculiarities of the sources themselves tend to make any conclusions about them impressionistic. The position taken here is that Athanasius' portrait does resemble the Anthony found in the other sources, though the biographer has exercised his power to emphasize and to de-emphasize certain traits. These traits and Athanasius' handling of them will be considered below. The important point to note here is that the *Life* was an immediate success, soon translated into Latin (in two versions) and several other languages, widely distributed, and eagerly read in both the Christian East and West (Bartelink 1994: 37–42, 68–70, 95–108). It is arguable that no other non-biblical Christian text has enjoyed so wide a circulation or been so influential a model for spiritual biographies of other notable figures such as Martin of Tours, Syncletica of Alexandria or the monks remembered by Cyril of Scythopolis.

Next in importance to the *Life* are the many sayings, or *apophthegmata*, attributed to Anthony or about him (Dörries 1949; Rubenson 1995: 145–62). The textual history and editorial complexities of the sayings are notorious, and using them as a check against other texts becomes a scholarly hall of mirrors. On the other hand, they can provide broad-stroke portraits of their subjects, as is immediately evident when reading sayings of or about major figures such as Arsenius, John Kolobos, or Poemen. One gains a sense of these monks even though the details cannot be pressed too closely. The sayings about Anthony, especially the most frequently repeated ones, are important evidence for how Anthony's monastic heirs chose to remember him. While surely preserving some actual dicta and historical information, they in any case illustrate the place accorded Anthony in the tradition and highlight what later monks found most constructive or memorable about his teaching.

Athanasius' *Life* was not the only narrative portrait of Anthony in early monastic literature. Palladius (c. 364–c. 425), an educated monk sympathetic to the controversial spiritual theology of Origen and his heir Evagrius Ponticus, has several

stories about Anthony in his *Lausiatic History* (c. 419). This work was actually written almost seventy years after Athanasius' *Life*, though it was based on the author's sojourn in Egypt at the end of the fourth century. Palladius had read the *Life of Anthony* – so had virtually everyone of his social class and religious interests – but he also had access to other sources from his own visits to various Egyptian monasteries including Anthony's at Pispis near the Nile (Figure 14.4). Palladius' Anthony sounds more like a classic desert elder than does Athanasius', perhaps because Palladius wrote from inside the monastic tradition and was more interested in Anthony's interactions with other monks than with the non-monastic luminaries highlighted by Athanasius. Palladius also wrote after Anthony's legacy and 'official' monastic reputation were firmly established.

In the *Lausiatic History* we find Anthony capable of severity towards other monks in the name of spiritual discipline (*LH* 21–2), a quality absent from Athanasius' portrayal. Palladius also notes Anthony's stratagem for screening visitors (*LH* 21.8), another indication that however holy he may have been he did not suffer fools gladly. Similar in tone to Palladius' accounts are the references to Anthony in the *History of the Monks of Egypt*, a travelogue roughly contemporary to the *Lausiatic History*. Both works are most significant for the information they provide about Anthony's network of disciples and their descendants, who were leaders of the Origenist party to which Palladius belonged (Rubenson 1995: 178–82).

The last major source of information about Anthony from the early period comes from the hagiography of the 'other' Egyptian monastic tradition, Pachomian cenobitism. Two versions of the *Life of Pachomius*, a kind of biography-cum-institutional history, describe a visit to Anthony by Pachomian monks shortly after their leader's death in 346 (*Bohairic Life of Pachomius* 126–33; *Greek Life* 120). The upshot of the interview is Anthony's praise of Pachomius and his communal form of monastic life. The Coptic *Life* even includes Anthony's regrets that he had been unable to become a cenobite himself! Setting aside questions of historical accuracy, the significance of the accounts lies in the importance accorded to Anthony's validation of the Pachomian movement as authentically monastic.

Thus the principal sources *about* Anthony. There remain the writings *by* Anthony. The *Life* by Athanasius mentions Anthony's correspondence with emperors (*Life* 81) and with an Arian official (*Life* 86). In the *Life of Pachomius* there are references to letters sent by Anthony to monks and to Athanasius; the Coptic version quotes from these letters (*Bohairic Life of Pachomius* 126–33; *Greek Life* 120). Seven other letters by Anthony, all addressed to monks and pertaining to the spiritual life, have survived in various states. Jerome notes the existence of the letters and their translation into Greek, though it is unclear whether he himself had read them (*De viris illustribus* 88). Obviously the *Letters* are of great importance for any study of Anthony since they are the most direct evidence we have of his own teaching (Rubenson 1995: 35–42). They contain no biographical information, though their affinities with Origen's theology and their use of philosophical language have important consequences for assessment of Anthony's educational background. Only one contains information about its addressees, who were monks at Arsinoë (*Letter* 6).

The *Letters* bear notable similarities of style and *Letters* 2–7 have close parallels of structure and content. This means that at least those six were probably written at

about the same time; a reference to Arius in *Letter* 4 suggests a date in the late 330s, i.e., about twenty years before Anthony's death (Rubenson 1995: 42–6). The *Letters*, then, offer snapshots of Anthony's concerns for particular audiences at a particular time. The letters quoted in the *Life of Pachomius* are later (346, the year of Pachomius' death); they provide no information about Anthony himself though the use of the epithet 'Israelite', interpreted as 'one who sees God', is a stylistic parallel with the earlier letters (*Letters* 3.6; cf. 5.1–2; 6.2, 78, 93; 7.5, 58).

The influence of Anthony's *Letters* on later monastic tradition has been much less than that of the *Life*. The Coptic original survives only in one seventh-century fragment. The Greek translation of the *Letters*, the earliest and also the most useful for wide distribution, has been lost. The Syriac version seems to have been early but partial (by 534, only one letter), and the Latin version is relatively modern (1475, from the now-lost Greek text). The best surviving witness is the Georgian translation. Much of the material is preserved in a thirteenth-century Arabic translation made from the lost Coptic original; according to a recent study of the *Letters*, the Arabic appears to be the only version based on the Coptic (Rubenson 1995: 15–34). This curious legacy suggests that even monks found the *Life* and the sayings to be more useful to them than the *Letters*. There are also aspects of the letters, particularly their more speculative passages, which would have made later readers nervous after the traumas of the Origenist Controversy. It has been suggested that the Anthony of the letters differs rather considerably from Athanasius' hero (Rubenson 1995); to assess this claim we will look at the teaching of the *Letters* in more detail below.

It is clear from even this brief review of the sources that we have to approach Anthony through the impressions, memories, and agenda of others except in so far as we can use the *Letters* to nuance those perspectives. To evaluate Anthony's role in monastic tradition, however, is a somewhat different matter than seeking the historical person. To begin to see Anthony as the greater number of his followers have seen him means working with all of the sources available. The resulting construct may not be 'historical', but it is arguably 'authentic' as a monastic archetype in which we can see the genesis of practices and teaching which would become central to monastic spirituality.

THE STORY

The basic plot of Anthony's life as presented by Athanasius is easily told. Born a Christian to prosperous landowning parents, he was orphaned with his younger sister when he was 18. Following a call to the ascetic life manifested externally in a dramatically literal obedience to Jesus' commands to leave all for his sake and to renounce all cares, Anthony disposed of his property, placed his sister in the care of local virgins and apprenticed himself to a village ascetic. Subject to the usual struggles of disengagement from the past and from alternative ways of life, Anthony showed a marked eagerness to confront the challenges directly, spending time in solitude in tombs at the edge of the nearby desert. After severe and frightening trials he resolved to pursue greater solitude and made the move that would bring him fame.

Going deeper into the desert, away from the security offered by proximity to settled land, he lived 20 years as a recluse in an abandoned fort at Pispir. After his protracted retreat he became available to both monks and seculars for advice. Many followed his example and settled around his retreat. He made at least two trips to Alexandria, one in the first decade of the fourth century to show his solidarity with Christian martyrs, the second (in 337 or 338) to fight Arianism.

In time he sought greater solitude and journeyed deeper into the Eastern desert, where he found a site remarkable for its beauty and its fresh spring. There he established his so-called 'Inner Mountain', from which he would commute periodically to the 'Outer Mountain', his first retreat at Pispir, to offer advice and teaching. He died at the Inner Mountain in 356 at an advanced age (Athanasius claims 105) and his *Life* was written the following year.

To this sketch we can add a few important elements from other sources. First, the *Letters* prove that Athanasius' references to Anthony's lack of letters (*Life* 1.2; 3.7; 73.3; 85.5; 93.4) are not to be taken as suggesting illiteracy but rather a Christian education instead of a primarily philosophical one (cf. *Life* 4.1; 44.2). Even Athanasius' Anthony, depicted as refuting the arguments of visiting philosophers by virtue of his faith in Christ and knowledge of the Bible (*Life* 74–80), urges his disciples to write down their thoughts as a technique of self-knowledge and discipline (*Life* 55.9–12). Study of the *Letters* reveals an acquaintance with the writings of Origen and a familiarity with the Hellenistic thought-world of the time. Despite his use of interpreters when meeting Greek-speakers (*Life* 74.2; 77.1; cf. 81.4), Anthony must have known some Greek himself (Rubenson 1995: 41–2); in any case Coptic is saturated with Greek loanwords.

Second, other sources provide the names of Anthony's closest associates. Athanasius names only two monks, Amoun of Nitria (*Life* 60) and Paphnutius 'the monk and confessor', bishop of the Upper Thebaid (*Life* 58.3). Neither was Anthony's disciple. Palladius and the *apophthegmata*, however, identify as Anthony's close followers Paul the Simple and Macarius the Egyptian ('the Great') (Palladius, *Dialogue* 17), and the *History of the Monks of Egypt* names Anthony's successors at Pispir, Ammonas and then Pityrion (*HM* 15.1–2). This lineage connects Anthony to major figures in later Egyptian monasticism. In sayings and letters attributed to these monks we can see the development of Anthony's teaching. Those texts both verify the monastic authenticity of Athanasius' presentation of Anthony and confirm Anthony's links to theologically sophisticated members of the Egyptian monastic scene.

SACRED GEOGRAPHY

Anthony was not the first monk, nor even the first hermit. What set him apart in the eyes of his contemporaries was his commitment to *anachoresis*, 'withdrawal'. Anthony's practice of *anachoresis* was expressed physically by greater and greater distance from settled regions. The stages of physical withdrawal were mirrored psychologically in his progressively deeper encounter with himself, a theme we will return to later.

Athanasius presents the physical journey in a somewhat stylized manner, but other sources confirm Anthony's withdrawal into deeper solitude at greater distances from human settlement. The move to the edge of the village as an ascetic was followed by brief periods spent in the tombs in the near desert. The spiritual symbolism of being sealed within a tomb is obvious, but for Anthony, an Egyptian, the move from the realm of the living to the abode of the dead had even more significance. The geographical distinction between life and death was clear in a land dependent on the river for sustenance. One did not have to go far to find the desert, to leave the zone of safety. But the difference was dramatic. The abode of the dead was also the home of the demons, spiritual counter-forces to human progress.

For Anthony to spend time in tombs was more than *Schadenfreude*. It was a challenge to all within him and beyond him that was opposed to life. Athanasius plays up this aspect of Anthony's story, using him as an exemplar of the fully divine Christ's victory over evil and death, a victory shared with those who believe in him. Although Athanasius' theological agenda is plain, there is no indication that he is betraying or even greatly distorting Anthony's own struggles or his reliance on faith in Christ. The direct literary parallels between the *Life of Anthony* and Athanasius' other writings are largely confined to the sections describing Anthony's debates with visiting philosophers (*Life* 74–9; see Bartelink 1994: 36–7). Furthermore, Anthony himself attacks Arius in *Letter* 4.17–18. As we shall see, battle against the demons was the principal focus of Anthony's ascetic teaching as recorded in both the *Life* and the *Letters*.

Anthony's decision to become a solitary in the desert was regarded by his peers as something novel (*Life* 3.2; 11.1–2). A link with civilization remained, for he settled in an abandoned fort 'in the mountain' (i.e., above the river valley) 'across the river' (*Life* 12.3) at the site known as Pispir. Nor was it the end of human contact, for he relied on others to bring him bread every six months and acquired disciples who would visit him there, though Athanasius claims he would only speak to them through the door and not actually see them (*Life* 12–13). A definitive break with ordinary society and with ascetic custom had nonetheless been made, and this became the basis for his extraordinary reputation. After 20 years he became available for consultation and would leave his hermitage to visit other monks, including those who settled around him. The scope of his pastoral activity will receive more attention below.

After an unspecified time he established a further retreat at what became known as the 'Inner Mountain' to distinguish it from the 'Outer Mountain' at Pispir. This move into the deep desert required both divine guidance and reliance on a Saracen caravan. Together they led him to a remote but beautiful location distinguished by a striking mountain and a vigorous fresh water spring (*Life* 49–50). The site traditionally considered that of the Inner Mountain, where the Coptic Monastery of Saint Anthony (Deir Amba Antonios; see Figure 43.1) can be visited to this day, was three days' journey east of the river towards the Red Sea.

Athanasius records that Anthony 'loved' his mountain. There he spent most of his time for the rest of his life, though he continued to visit Pispir for pastoral purposes (*Life* 57–8; 84.3–5; 85.1–4). Occasionally he would receive visitors at the Inner Mountain, but the distance and harsh conditions of the journey would have



Figure 43.1 The Monastery of Saint Anthony today, with his 'Inner Mountain' rising behind. Photo C. Stewart.



Figure 43.2 Entrance to Anthony's Cave near the top of the 'Inner Mountain'. Photo C. Stewart.

discouraged all but the most intent (*Life* 50.7; 59.2; 82.3). Tended in extreme old age by two disciples, Anthony died at the Inner Mountain in 356 at the age of 105 and was buried, claims Athanasius, in a secret location (*Life* 92).

Athanasius depicts Anthony's move into the desert as the beginning of monastic colonization of demon-held territory, threatening Satan's domination of lifeless regions (*Life* 14.7; 41.1–4). He complements this hyperbolic, propagandist stance with a more attractive vision of the desert as an alternative, truly Christian, society where prayer, love and ascetic discipline ensured peace (*Life* 44.2–4). Anthony himself was able to re-establish the paradisiacal harmony between human beings and animals (*Life* 50.8–9). The notion of an ideal society in the desert was not new; Philo had said the same of the Therapeutae in his treatise *On the Contemplative Life*. In the Christian and monastic context, however, there was an added theological dimension of establishing a kind of intermediate zone between earth and heaven in which human beings (and all of nature) were restored to their intended condition in preparation for eschatological glorification.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND ASCETICISM

The anthropology found in both *Life* and *Letters* presumes the essential goodness of human beings created with freedom of the will (*Life* 20; *Letters* 7). The decision to listen to evil insinuations by fallen spiritual essences (Satan, demons) led humans to an irrationality in which the body escaped the control of the intellect (Greek *nous*) and was subject to domination by the passions and constant suggestions from the demons (e.g., *Letters* 2). Alongside this basically biblical model there are elements of Origen's cosmological perspective emphasizing a fall from the original unity of spiritual essence to the present multiplicity of creatures (see *Letters* 6.5–6, 56–62, 84; cf. Rubenson 1995: 64–8). The Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ made 'resurrection of the mind' possible (*Letters* 2.23, etc.), to be realized through ascetic discipline prompted and supported by the Holy Spirit, who teaches knowledge and discernment (*Letters* 1.18–34).

The *Life* offers a generally holistic view of the interaction of body and spirit (*Life* 14.3–4; 67.6–8) while being suspicious of allowing the body too much in the way of concession (*Life* 45.2–7). This latter point is stressed in the *Letters*, which emphasize the captivity of the body to the passions and to evil spirits (e.g., *Letters* 6.51–3). Even so, the body is not scorned or ignored, but is involved in the ascetic process and transformative work of the Spirit (*Letters* 1.46–71; *Life* 22.3; *Sayings* Anthony 8 and 13). The powerful pneumatology of the *Letters* is all the more striking when compared with the *Life*'s almost entirely Christological orientation. It may be here particularly that one sees the anti-Arian agenda of Athanasius, for whom a potent pneumatology would not have been nearly as helpful as an emphasis on the divine power of Christ. The *Letters* present a more balanced perspective that is both centred on Christ and dynamically pneumatological.

As Athanasius describes it, Anthony's asceticism was typical of what we know about Egyptian anchoritic monasticism. It was a severe but, in relative terms, not an excessive regimen (*Life* 7.6; 47.2; 51.1). He ate once daily, relying on bread, salt,

vegetables, olives and oil but excluding meat and wine (*Life* 7.6; 51.1). Often he would extend his fast and eat less frequently (*Life* 7.6; 47.2). He never bathed or used oil on his body (*Life* 7.6; 47.2; 93.1). He wore a goatskin garment with the hair turned inside, and slept on a mat or sometimes on the bare ground using a cloak given him by Athanasius (*Life* 4.1; 7.6; 47.2; 91.8–9). The basic elements of his spiritual discipline were dedication to prayer, especially in night-time vigil, memorization of biblical texts, and manual labour (*Life* 4.1; 30.2; 44.2; 55; *Letters* 1.77). He worked both for personal economic support and to help the poor; it is noted in the *Life* that Anthony made rope to earn money for food (*Life* 30.2; 44.2; 53.1). The exhortatory nature of the *Letters* means that they have little to say about ascetic practices.

The distinctive traits of Anthony's ascetic teaching were his emphasis on focused intention and self-knowledge. The first is most prominent in the *Life*, the second pervades both *Life* and *Letters*. He cautioned against dwelling on memories of the past (*Life* 7.11; 20.1–2; cf. Anthony, *Sayings* 6). Monastic life means daily recommitment to the discipline (*Life* 7.12; 16.3; 47.1; 91.2) in awareness of the brevity of life (*Life* 16.4–8; 19.2–3; 45.1; 89.4; 91.3). In the *Letters*, self-knowledge is the overarching theme, set within the broadly 'gnostic' framework of those texts (Rubenson 1995: 59–64). In the *Life*, however, the Stoic language of 'paying heed (*prosechein*) to the self' is preferred (*Life* 3.1–2; 55.5–13; 91.3) and 'knowledge' language is absent. This could be owing to anxiety on Athanasius' part that such language would be construed in a heterodox manner despite its roots in both biblical



Figure 43.3 View from Anthony's Cave near the top of the 'Inner Mountain'. Photo C. Stewart.

(especially Johannine) and Alexandrian tradition. In ascetic terms the difference is minimal, though theologically in the *Letters* the gnostic terminology is tied closely to the pneumatological emphasis equally absent in the *Life*. In later monastic texts the terminology of the *Life* would prevail.

THOUGHTS AND DEMONS

The practical application of self-knowledge is learning to 'discern spirits', i.e., to understand the activity of one's thoughts (*logismoi*) and the manipulation of them by demonic counter-forces. In the *Life of Anthony*, the terms 'demon', 'spirit', and 'thought' are used synonymously for these counter-forces, with a preference for 'demon' (60 instances, versus 16 for 'thought' and two for 'spirit'). In the *Letters* the proportions are equal (about six each), and the term 'passion' occurs alongside them to describe the human faculty stirred by demonic suggestion. Athanasius claims that Anthony learned how to understand and combat the demons from the Bible (*Life* 7.3; 16.1); the key text, Eph. 6:11–17, is cited or alluded to five times in the *Life*.

Athanasius describes Anthony's personal struggles with memories and temptations, especially in the early stages of his monastic life, as a progression from issues about external material and social issues (possessions, family, money, fame) to bodily ones (food, leisure, lust), and finally to emotional issues such as struggle with sadness and discouragement (see *Life* 5). The descriptions in the *Life* are vivid: he experienced physical traumata (to the point of unconsciousness, *Life* 8), heard voices, and saw apparitions (*Life* 6; 8–9; 13; 35; 51.2–5).

These descriptions are fascinating but disturbing to the reader. To help the reader understand their significance, Athanasius includes a lengthy discourse (28 chapters) attributed to Anthony summarizing his teaching about how the demons play on human weakness to discourage hopes for progress (*Life* 16–43; see Guillaumont 1957: 189–96). Although we cannot know how much of the address is actually attributable to Anthony, its basic teaching clearly derives from considerable ascetic experience and must have come to Athanasius from within the monastic movement. This text, or perhaps one should say the teaching contained in it, was the basis for later development by ascetic theologians such as Evagrius Ponticus (d. 399). In the *Letters* the appeal for self-knowledge is directed in the first place towards understanding the inner confusion caused by sin and demonic influence; one could see *Letters* 1 and 6 as counterparts to the discourse in the *Life*.

Anthony is more interested in providing practical directives than in developing a demonology as such (see *Life* 21.5, and cf. the emphasis on Anthony's experience in 22.4, 39–41, 51–3). The general theological framework is the conventional one, articulated and developed by Origen, that demons are fallen spiritual creatures motivated by jealousy to retard human recovery of original goodness (*Life* 21–2; *Letters* 6.30–62; see Daniélou 1957: 182–9). In both *Life* and *Letters* the ascetic's confrontation with the demons is placed within a cosmic salvation history that regards the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of Christ as a definitive turning point in the human struggle against sin. Since Christ's coming, the demons have



Figure 43.4 The temptations of Anthony as imagined by late sixteenth-century artists. From *Solitudo, sive vitae patrum eremicorum*, by Jan and Raphael Sadeler, after figures by Maarten de Vos, c. 1590.

been robbed of their real power and must do what they can through deception and pretence (*Life* 28–9).

The ascetic's task is to see through the schemes of the demons and to claim the power that comes through invoking the name of Christ (as in the *Life*) or receiving the Spirit (as in the *Letters*). Indeed, Athanasius uses Anthony's triumph over the demons as a case in point that Christians serve the true God and tread the false gods (the demons) of the pagans underfoot (*Life* 94). Demons have no bodies of their own, which makes them invisible (*Letters* 6.50), impossible to exclude (*Life* 28.3–5), and able to move so quickly from place to place that they can seem to predict the future on the basis of what they have seen somewhere else (*Life* 33.2–6). Their lack of bodies means that they work within the human soul ('we are their bodies': *Letters* 6.51) and have direct access to thoughts. Therefore they can pattern themselves according to what they find, playing on anxiety or despair or pride: if one avoids such states, the demons have less room for manoeuvre (*Life* 27.4; 42). More dangerously, they can also masquerade as angels promising glory (*Life* 35.1), or as exemplary monks shaming one into despair (*Life* 25).

The best technique for discerning the activity of the demons is awareness of one's feelings: fear or distress are signs of demonic instigation, while joy and calm are

good spirits (*Life* 35–6). Any intrusive thought or apparition is to be interrogated (*Life* 11.3–4; 43; cf. 41.2), and thoughts can be written down as an aid to self awareness (*Life* 55.9). The *Letters* repeat incessantly the imperative to know oneself. To block the corrosive work of the demons, Anthony used and recommended the use of biblical texts, especially the Psalms (*Life* 9.3; 13.7; 37.4; 39.3, 6; 40.5; 52.3). This practice, known in later tradition as ‘antirrhetic’ (literally, ‘counter-suggestive’) prayer, was a basic component of monastic discipline. He recommends invocation of the name of Christ (*Life* 39.2; 40.2; 41.6; 63.3) and use of the Sign of the Cross as defensive tactics (*Life* 13.5; 35.2; 53.2; 80.4). All of these techniques require the ability to be aware of what is happening and to achieve some distance from the immediacy of the experience. Such perspective is what ‘discernment of spirits’ means in practice; Anthony regards it as a divine grace given in answer to much prayer (*Life* 22.3; 38.5; *Letters* 1 and 6, *passim*).

MONK AND MINISTER

Anthony is famous as ascetic and hermit, but he was extraordinarily available to others. Athanasius notes how much he was loved in his early days as a village ascetic (*Life* 4.4) and emphasizes his grace of speech and presence (*Life* 14.6; 73.4; 87). In a crowd of monks Anthony was unmistakable because of the calm and joy he radiated to others (*Life* 67.4–8). The calm was contagious: Anthony was a ‘physician given to Egypt by God’ (*Life* 87.3). One of the most striking sayings attributed to him contains the line: ‘our life and death is with our neighbour’ (Anthony, *Sayings* 9). He emphasized love for others (*Life* 4.1; 17.7; 44.2; 81.5–6; *Letters* 6.91–2; Anthony, *Sayings* 21) and the dangers of anger (*Life* 4.1; 17.2; 30.2; 55; *Letters* 6.33–9). The latter theme would be of central importance in later monastic writings.

In the *Life*, Anthony’s 20 years of reclusion at the Outer Mountain ended when disciples broke down the door and called him forth to minister to them (*Life* 14.2). He handled such demands without apparent resentment (*Life* 14.4; 70.4), though he guarded his solitude; his most famous dictum is that a monk away from his cell is like a fish out of water (*Life* 85.3–4; Anthony, *Sayings* 10). As noted earlier, after his withdrawal to the Inner Mountain he preferred to see visitors only at the Outer Mountain of Pispir. Palladius records that even at Pispir he used a receptionist, Brother Macarius, to screen visitors. If they were announced as coming ‘from Egypt’ they received a meal and a blessing; if ‘from Jerusalem’, Anthony would stay up all night talking with them (*LH* 21.8).

Naturally enough, his primary ministry was to other monks through teaching and counselling. This work is mentioned several times in the *Life* and was the context for the sayings preserved in the *apophthegmata* and for the *Letters*. However, monks were not his only audience. Many lay people came to him for healing. When health was granted he attributed it to the power of Christ called upon in prayer; when healing did not occur, Athanasius observes, the suppliants benefited from his words of encouragement (*Life* 48; 56–8; 84.1). According to the *Life*, Anthony visited Alexandria at least twice. The first time was to show solidarity with Christian martyrs during the fierce persecutions of early fourth-century Egypt. After visiting

the imprisoned and practising a form of civil disobedience, he returned to the desert intent on sharing the suffering of the martyrs through his own ascesis (*Life* 46–7). About twenty years later (c. 337–8) he returned to Alexandria to battle Arianism in support of the Nicene cause (*Life* 69–70).

In addition to the letters mentioned earlier, he wrote to an Arian official in protest of his treatment of Nicene Christians (*Life* 86) and was consulted by emperors (*Life* 81.1; cf. Anthony, *Sayings* 31). One should note that these events and the extant collection of *Letters* appear to date from around the 330s, a period when Anthony's fame was well established and he was still active in his various ministries (if Athanasius' chronology is accurate, he would have been in his eighties). It is clear from the ubiquity of Anthony in monastic and other literary sources that Athanasius gives us a faithful portrait of this monk very much involved in the lives of other people.

LEGACY

Anthony was both exemplar and exception. Later tradition venerated his example while cautioning his imitators to do nothing without counsel: Anthony's largely solitary formation was not to be the prevailing model (cf. Anthony, *Sayings* 1 for his angelic spiritual director). The psychological experiences Athanasius describes present the array – and even the stages – of struggles against forces of gluttony, lust, avarice, anger, sadness, accidie, vainglory and pride that would be systematized by Evagrius Ponticus at the end of the fourth century. The transformed, peaceful and inviting Anthony of the *Life* (e.g., *Life* 14; 67) is the perfect embodiment of the ideal Evagrius would describe as *apatheia* or Cassian as 'purity of heart'. We cannot draw the lines of spiritual descent as precisely as we would like, but Anthony's influence on Ammonas, his successor at Pispir, and Macarius the Great, teacher of Evagrius, placed him at the origins of the most important theological tradition of the Egyptian desert.

Perhaps most significant is that Anthony was a force not only of that extraordinary period of early monastic fervour. His story has endured better than those of most of his contemporaries, and perhaps best of them all. A 'physician given to Egypt by God', indeed, but not to Egypt only.

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ATHANASIUS



David Brakke

From his election as bishop of Alexandria in 328, until his death in 373, and to the present day, Athanasius has aroused passionate and polarized reactions. While admirers have praised his courageous defence of Nicene orthodoxy, even imputing to him 'a total lack of self-interest' (Robertson 1892: lxvii), others have condemned his violent personality, even comparing him to 'a modern American gangster' (Barnes 1987: 397). If today's ordinary Christians have any impression of him, it may be an unpleasant one, based on something Athanasius did not write (but would surely endorse): the so-called Athanasian Creed, which consigns to eternal torment anyone who does not share its uncompromising Trinitarian theology (Kelly 1964). Athanasius' dual identity as saint and gangster stems from his more basic identity as a Christian bishop in the post-Constantinian imperially favoured church: the fourth-century bishop's roles as preacher, theologian, patron, and administrator render hopeless any modern attempt to separate 'religion' from 'politics' or 'thought' from 'action'.

For Athanasius, 'the Incarnation [of the Word of God] was the clarifying and compelling key to alienation and disorder, chaos and death' (Lyman 1993: 131). His political and theological efforts find their focus in the attempt to bring stability, unity, and divine power out of the instability, fragmentation, and human frailty that characterized fallen individuals, the divided Christian church, and the tumultuous ancient Mediterranean world. Just as it was necessary for a fully divine Word of God to become incarnate in a human body in order to bring healing transformation to the disordered human personality, so too it appeared necessary for a fully authoritative bishop of Alexandria to use all the means at his disposal to bring salvific unity to the chaotic Egyptian church. If the resulting Athanasius seems less appealing than, say, the Augustine who sanctioned coercive actions against the Donatists, it is perhaps because, unlike Augustine, Athanasius has left us few glimpses of the inner life of a man burdened with such weighty responsibilities. The public Athanasius, Athanasius the bishop of Alexandria and patriarch of Egypt, is the only Athanasius we can know.

CONFLICTS AND CONTROVERSIES (299–335 CE)

Athanasius was born around 299 CE, received a Christian (but not classical) education, and as a young man became the protégé of Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria from 312 to 328. As Alexander's secretary and a deacon, Athanasius drafted writings for the bishop (Stead 1988) and accompanied him to the Council of Nicaea in 325 (Severus, *Historia patrum Alexandrinorum* 1.8; Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica* 2.17; Socrates, *Historia ecclesiastica* 1.14). While Athanasius was on a mission to the imperial court on the bishop's behalf (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 68.7.2; 69.11.4; Barnes 1993: 18), Alexander died on 17 April 328. Athanasius, whom Alexander had designated as his successor, returned to Alexandria, where, in circumstances so disputed that the actual truth may never be known, he was consecrated bishop on 8 June. Athanasius immediately faced opposition to his election from Christians both inside and outside Egypt, eventually was charged with a variety of crimes (including murder), and by 335 was in exile in Trier, the first of five times he would be forced to leave the city. These tumultuous events early in Athanasius' episcopal career reflect the disordered state of Christianity in Egypt and elsewhere in the early fourth century, to which the beleaguered bishop tried to bring unity and coherence.¹ They are also rooted in the agonistic, group-oriented culture of the late ancient Mediterranean, in which social and political ties counted for more than theological ideas (Malina 1993: 28–116).



Figure 44.1 Icon of Athanasius, by the contemporary Greek artist Ralles Kopsides and owned by Professor Thomas Torrance. Photo reproduced from Torrance (1988) with the permission of the author and T&T Clark.

The 'Melitian' and 'Arian' conflicts

First of all, there were two Christian churches in Egypt, each with its own hierarchy of bishops and priests, a situation known as 'the Melitian schism'. This conflict began during the persecutions that Christians suffered in the first decade of the fourth century (the 'Great Persecution'). In 304, Peter, the bishop of Alexandria, was forced to go into hiding to avoid arrest and likely execution and thus was not able easily to carry out his duties, which had traditionally included appointing bishops throughout Egypt and Libya. Peter's absence created an opportunity for the bishops of Upper Egypt (south of Alexandria but upstream on the Nile) to assert some independence from the Alexandrian patriarch, and thus bishop Melitius of Lycopolis began ordaining priests for Alexandria and installing bishops and priests in other sees. Peter and other hiding bishops denounced what they considered an illegitimate intervention into their spheres of authority and had Melitius excommunicated before Peter was martyred in 311. By the time of the Council of Nicaea in 325, long after Peter's death, there were then two Christian churches in Egypt, a Petrine one and a Melitian one, each claiming to be the true single Christian church. Although later interpreters presented the conflict as one between the 'rigorist' Melitius and the 'moderate' Peter over how severely Christians who lapsed in persecution should be treated, the real issue originally appears to have been the authority of the Alexandrian bishop over the rest of Egypt, which in some ways was socially and culturally different from the great metropolis (Martin 1996: 217–98; Bagnall 1993).

Meanwhile, during Alexander's term as bishop of Alexandria, the Petrine church itself became divided over issues of theology and episcopal authority (Williams 1987; Marrou 1976). Since the earliest expansion of Christianity out of the city to the rest of Egypt in the second and third centuries, the bishop of Alexandria had exercised great power over the bishops and clergy in Egypt and Libya, but within the city the bishop was traditionally seen merely as the first among his equals, the priests, who were accustomed to electing the bishop from among themselves and to preaching and teaching in the city's local churches and Christian schools with autonomy. Values associated with 'intellectual freedom' were deep-rooted in Alexandrian Christianity, which had a long tradition of educated Christianity centred around brilliant teachers and scholars, such as Clement, Origen, and Valentinus. In the late 310s bishop Alexander became concerned about the preaching of Arius, the popular priest of the church of Baucalis, who taught that the Word of God who became incarnate in Jesus Christ was not divine in the same sense as God the Father was, but rather became worthy of the title 'Son of God' based on his exceptional advance in virtue, which human beings could now imitate. In contrast, Alexander believed that the Word was as eternal, divine, and unchanging as the Father. Despite the insistence of Arius and sympathetic Alexandrian clergy that his views were traditional, Alexander convened a synod of Egyptian and Libyan bishops (whose appointments he had approved), which rejected the teachings of Arius and excommunicated all who adhered to them. Here Alexander tried to use his patriarchal authority outside Alexandria to trump his weaker position with respect to the Alexandrian clergy. (The Melitians, by the way, insisted on their 'orthodoxy' on this

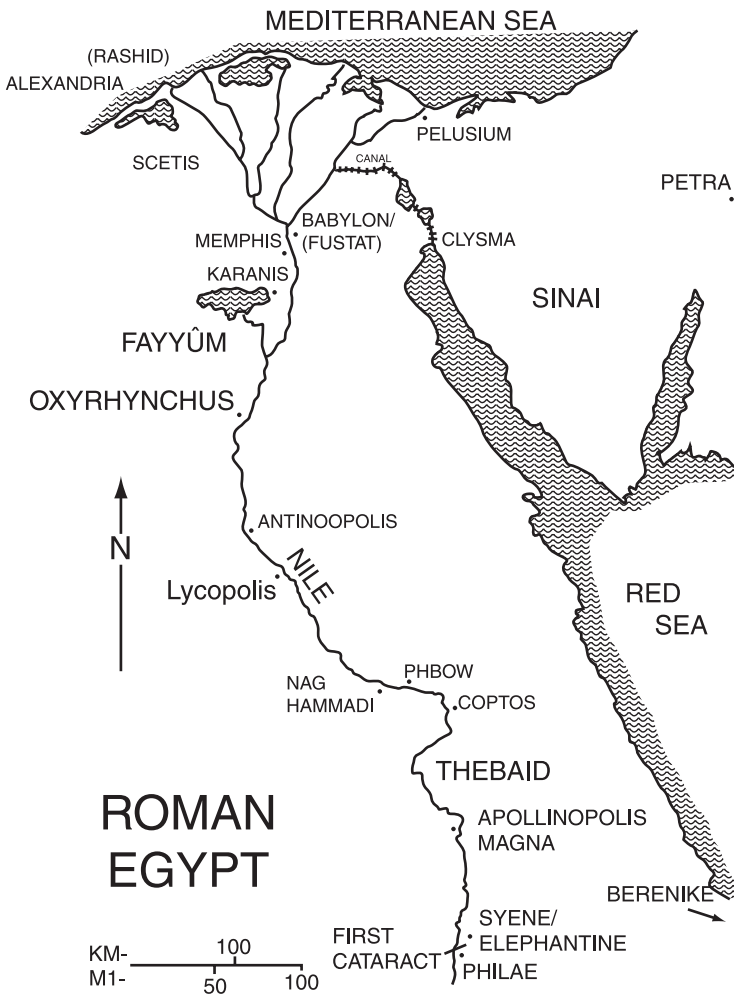


Figure 44.2 Map of Roman Egypt. Adapted from Haas (1997: 4), by permission of The Johns Hopkins University Press.²

matter, so much so that they later falsely claimed that Melitius himself had condemned Arius long before Alexander did!)

Alexander's actions did not end the controversy, however, because Arius had numerous followers in the city of Alexandria. These included priests and deacons who considered his teachings acceptable or who resented Alexander's heavy-handed response (which was not in keeping with either the historically collegial role of the bishop within the city or Alexandria's traditions of intellectual freedom); local parishioners who found Arius' eloquent preaching inspiring; and numerous ascetic Christians, male and female, for whom Arius' theology and spirituality were congenial with their own efforts at disciplined improvement in virtue. Arius found additional support outside Egypt, among bishops in Asia Minor, Syria, and Pales-

tine, who shared his theological views (or at least regarded them within the range of acceptable diversity), who saw an opportunity to reduce the international prestige of the bishop of Alexandria, or both. Councils in Asia Minor and Palestine found Arius' views orthodox and urged Alexander to accept him into his church. Alexander refused, and thus the stage was set for an international resolution of the controversy at the Council of Nicaea.

It is important to note that both the 'Melitian' and the 'Arian' conflicts were not about theological doctrine or pastoral policies alone, but raised the issue of the authority of the bishop, whose role as centre of church unity and guarantor of 'orthodoxy' was growing markedly in the new imperially favoured church, but not without resistance. 'At the level of patriarchs', that is of Alexander and his successor Athanasius, 'questions of authority and appropriate governance cannot be disassociated from issues of doctrine' (Elm 1998: 83).

At Nicaea the young Athanasius saw his mentor Alexander vindicated on the questions both of Melitius and Arius. The Council recognized the Petrine organization, headed by Alexander, as the legitimate church in Egypt. It commanded Melitius, who was still alive, to retire to Lycopolis and not to involve himself in ecclesiastical affairs, but it recognized Melitian ordinations and allowed for Melitian bishops and priests to be integrated into the Petrine hierarchy by submitting to the authority of the bishop of Alexandria. Meanwhile, the Council excommunicated Arius and exiled several bishops who had embraced his cause. It adopted a theological statement that heavily emphasized the unity of the Father and Son as one God: the Son is 'begotten, not created', and 'of one substance' (*homoousios*) with the Father. It was a good meeting for Alexander and Athanasius. It is possible that it was in the wake of these successes that Athanasius wrote his impressive two-volume work, *Against the Nations* and *On the Incarnation of the Word*, without any explicit mention of Arius or his teachings (Barnes 1993: 12–13).³

But the years that followed did not see these conflicts lessened. Soon even bishops who had signed the creed adopted at Nicaea began to worry that it supported the views of a theologian like Marcellus of Ancyra, who saw little if any distinction between the Father and Son. The emperor Constantine, eager to bring unity to the church, allowed exiled bishops to return to their posts and urged Alexander to readmit a supposedly repentant Arius to communion. This Alexander refused to do. Meanwhile, Nicaea's Melitian policy created awkward problems in cities and villages where there were now two bishops (Martin 1996: 313–17) and did not address the underlying dissatisfaction of Upper Egyptian bishops with submitting to Alexandrian authority. Such was the situation when Alexander died in April 328, with Athanasius on a mission to the imperial court to explain the patriarch's policy on Arius.

A disputed election and criminal accusations

Although Alexander had designated Athanasius as his choice to succeed him, matters were not so simple. For one thing, it appears that Athanasius was just shy of thirty, the minimum age for bishops according to canons adopted at Nicaea, and he was only a deacon, not yet a priest, the rank from which bishops were traditionally

chosen in Alexandria (although not elsewhere). Moreover, an early practice in which the priests of Alexandria elected the bishop and then the bishops of Egypt consecrated him had only recently given way to election by the bishops, and at least one ancient source recalls that priests were still involved in Athanasius' election (*Apophthegmata Patrum* Poemen 78 [PG 65: 341]). Finally, this was the first election in which both Petrine and reconciled Melitian bishops would participate, raising the question of whether even former Melitian bishops who now shared a see with a Petrine one could vote (Martin 1996: 331–2) and making the achievement of consensus very difficult. It appears that, before any decision had been reached, a small minority of the gathered bishops went ahead and consecrated Athanasius: while many (if not most) of the other bishops accepted this development, numerous others did not, particularly the 'reconciled' Melitians, who elected their own bishop of Alexandria. The Melitian schism returned in a new, more dramatic form: for the first time even Alexandria itself had rival bishops, a situation repeated numerous times in the following century.

Thus, Athanasius' position as bishop and patriarch was precarious from the start. In addition to the ongoing political controversies over Arius and Petrine-Melitian relations, the unity of Egyptian Christianity under the Alexandrian patriarch was rendered fragile in more subtle ways, especially by the rapid growth of monastic movements (Brakke 1995). Ascetic Christians had long been a part of Christian communities in Alexandria and Egypt, but in the late third and early fourth centuries the number of such persons increased dramatically. In cities like Alexandria, 'renouncers', whether male 'solitaries' or female 'virgins', practised such disciplines as fasting, celibacy, and meditation, and lived in a variety of settings: at home with their families, in small single-sex communities, or in male-female celibate partnerships. It was not clear to what extent these Christians were under the authority of bishops and priests, whether Athanasian or Melitian. In Leontopolis, for example, a brilliant scholar named Hieracas led a community of celibate men and women who studied scripture under his direction and worshipped apart from ordinary Christians, sometimes singing songs composed by Hieracas. Could the local bishop tell Hieracas and his followers what to believe and how to worship? In and near the villages of Upper Egypt, a monk named Pachomius was founding a series of communal estates, where male or female monks lived, worked, and prayed together. Some more solitary monks, especially those who braved the heat and dangers of the desert, exemplified by the famous Anthony, became Christian superstars, to whom other Christians looked for spiritual guidance and miraculous deeds, such as healings and exorcisms. These charismatic Christians and their followers posed challenges to the idea of Christianity as centred around local churches, led by bishops and priests.

After his election, Athanasius tried to meet these challenges directly. It was the custom of the Alexandrian patriarch annually to announce the date of Easter in a *Festal Letter*, which he could use also to exhort his followers throughout Egypt and Libya. In his first such letter, written in the winter of 329, Athanasius makes no mention of his disputed election. Instead, he praises the benefits of fasting before Easter and declares that both ascetic and married Christians are following calls to virtue; he then turns to a traditional if distasteful way of promoting cohesion among

Christians: disparaging the Jews, whom he derides as 'ignorant' (*Epistulae festales* 1.3, 7 [ed. Cureton 1848: 14, 17]). He also made a trip through the Thebaid (Upper Egypt), much of which was Melitian territory, to consolidate his support. Such a tour of the Alexandrian patriarch was an impressive display of power, akin to an imperial *adventus* (the elaborately staged and celebrated arrival of a touring emperor in a city): 'He was mounted on a donkey and countless people were following him, including bishops, innumerable clerics with lamps and candles, and also monks from various places who were preceding him chanting psalms and canticles' (*Bohairic Life of Pachomius* 201 [trans. Veilleux 1980: 249], describing a later tour). One local bishop, Sarapion of Tentyra, had hoped that during his visit Athanasius would resolve a conflict between himself and the monastic leader Pachomius by ordaining Pachomius a priest and thus making him subordinate to Bishop Sarapion. Nothing came of this request, but it illustrated the growing tensions between monks and clergy that Athanasius would eventually have to address (Brakke 1995: 113–20). Athanasius made at least two more episcopal tours of regions under his patriarchal authority in the next four years (*Festal Index* 4, 6 [ed. Martin and Albert 1985: 230–2]).

Back in Alexandria, however, events began to turn against Athanasius, as an alliance formed between his Melitian enemies within Egypt and his pro-Arius enemies outside Egypt. The latter, led by Eusebius of Nicomedia, wished to see Arius restored to communion and were alarmed by the absence in the creed of Nicaea of any way to understand the separateness of the Father and the Son. The Melitians supplied Eusebius and his allies with criminal charges against Athanasius that could be the basis for his removal from office. These ranged from financial improprieties (bribery, forced requisition of linen tunics), to violence (beatings, imprisonments, even murder), to sacrilege (the destruction of a consecrated chalice used by a Melitian priest). A complicated series of events led to an international council of bishops at Tyre in 335, which found convincing evidence for the chalice incident, admitted Arius and the Melitians to communion, deposed Athanasius from his office, and appointed a new bishop of Alexandria. Since it was then up to Constantine to enforce these decisions, Athanasius secretly fled Tyre and raced to meet the emperor in Constantinople. Constantine agreed to set aside the Council's decisions, but the temperamental Athanasius managed to insult the emperor, who then sent the bishop into exile in Trier in November 335 (Barnes 1993: 19–33). Although Constantine had set aside the verdict of the Council of Tyre, the criminal accusations of violence and extortion would haunt Athanasius for the rest of his career.

Was Athanasius guilty of the charges made against him? Some, like the charge of murder, were disproved at the time, but others have remained unresolved, Athanasius' writings being the only surviving evidence. But in 1924 H. I. Bell published a papyrus letter written in 335 by a Melitian named Callistus to two priests in a Melitian monastery (*P. Lond.* 1914 [ed. Bell 1924: 53–71]). In this letter Callistus reports how 'partisans of Athanasius' tried to seize the Melitian bishop of Alexandria, Heraiscus, and his guests, and when they could not, beat four Melitian monks nearly to death. Callistus vividly describes Athanasius' anxiety as he faced the Council of Tyre: the 'despondent' bishop would send his baggage to the boat and then

nervously call it back. He says that Athanasius tried to prevent opponents from travelling to the Council by imprisoning Melitian clergy in various prisons and even the meat-market. Although Callistus' letter does not corroborate any specific charge made against Athanasius at Tyre, it has been viewed by most scholars as the smoking gun that demonstrates that 'Athanasius exercised power and protected his position in Alexandria by the systematic use of violence and intimidation' (Barnes 1993: 32). Defenders of Athanasius' saintly character have had to work very hard to cast doubts on this first-hand evidence (Arnold 1991).

Late ancient Alexandria, it must be remembered, was a multicultural city, in which ongoing tensions between and within ethnic and religious communities at times burst into acts of violence, such as riots, lynchings, destruction of property, and outright warfare (Haas 1997). During the fourth century, not only in Alexandria but throughout the empire, violence and intimidation, whether by rioting mobs or by small groups of professionals, became one of the tools available to Christian bishops in their efforts to secure both their own power and the solidarity of their communities (Brown 1992: 90–1; MacMullen 1990; McLynn 1992). It would indeed be a miraculous instance of saintliness had Athanasius been able to exempt himself from his society and culture in this regard. Despite his many protests of innocence of the charges against him, it is not clear that Athanasius' definition of saintliness required such pacific restraint. To his mind, people's orthodox belief and ultimate salvation were not separable from their obedience to himself as head of the Catholic church in Egypt. In 369, confronted with Christians who promoted martyr cults that were not under his authority, Athanasius declared that just as Christ had violently forced the money-changers out of the Temple, so these disobedient Christians should be 'driven out by whippings . . . for those who commit such a sin must receive the same punishment' (*Ep. fest.* 41 [ed. Lefort 1955: 26]; Brakke 1998: 480–1). The analogy of 'a modern American gangster' fails to capture this volatile combination of genuine religious conviction and brute political force, which may better be compared to that of a modern Iranian ayatollah.

INTERNATIONAL POLITICS (335–73 CE)

The remaining four decades of Athanasius' episcopal career were as tumultuous as the first seven years. His changing fortunes reflected not only the ebb and flow of theological debates over the doctrine of God (Hanson 1988) but also the vicissitudes of imperial politics, which now became closely intertwined with ecclesiastical affairs (Barnes 1993). Controversy over Athanasius always centred ostensibly on allegations of professional misconduct, while the bishop himself consistently (and not groundlessly) claimed that hostility to his theological beliefs was the real motivation behind the actions of his opponents.

Intrigues with the sons of Constantine (337–53 CE)

Athanasius' exile in Trier came to an end not long after the death of Constantine on 22 May 337; within a month, the new emperors – Constantinus, Constantius and

Constans, sons of Constantine – allowed all exiled bishops to return to their homes. Athanasius did not enter Alexandria until November, for he travelled through the eastern empire lending assistance to his political allies before reclaiming his own see. The bishop did not have long to enjoy his homecoming: a council (probably in Antioch) in the winter of 337–8 yet again deposed Athanasius, who travelled to Cappadocia to plead his case before Constantius (Barnes 1993: 36–45). This mission forestalled enforcement of the deposition, and in the summer of 338 Athanasius arranged for the famous monk Anthony to make a highly publicized visit to Alexandria as a show of support for the Athanasian cause (*Festal Index* 10 [ed. Martin and Albert 1985: 236]; *Life of Anthony* (*Vita Antonii*) 69–71 [ed. Bartelink 1994: 314–20]). His *Festal Letter* for this year encourages his followers in the face of ‘afflictions’ from ‘the Ario-maniacs’ (*Ep. fest.* 10.1, 9 [ed. Cureton 1848: 45, 49–50]), and it is likely that at this time he also wrote a letter to Alexandrian virgins that exhorts them to avoid the teachings of Arius and Hieracas (*Ep. virg.* 1 [ed. Lefort 1955: 73–99; trans. Brakke 1995: 274–91]; Brakke 1994a: 24–5). The following winter yet another council at Antioch found Athanasius guilty of the chalice incident and additional acts of violence: he was deposed, and a Gregory of Cappadocia was named as his replacement. Constantius enforced this decision through his imperial officers in Egypt. Gregory entered Alexandria on 22 March 339. Athanasius had already gone into hiding to avoid arrest, and on 16 April he left Egypt for Rome, which was in Constans’ territory and thus out of the reach of Constantius.

In Rome Athanasius undertook a vigorous campaign to win back his see (Barnes 1993: 47–55). On the political front, he wrote an *Encyclical Letter* to numerous bishops giving his version of the events that had led to his expulsion. He gained the support of bishop Julius of Rome, wrote pleading letters to the emperors Constans and Constantius, and recruited to his side prominent Christians in the Roman aristocracy. Theologically, he began his rich and substantive *Orations Against the Arians*, which eventually ran to three books. This work begins by mocking Arius and his teachings as ‘effeminate’ (*Ar.* 1.5 [*PG* 26: 20]; Burrus 1991: 235–9), but then turns to a vigorous defence of the essential unity and likeness of the Father and Son and to exegesis of biblical passages such as Prov. 8:22, which his opponents cited as evidence of the Word’s created status.

Athanasius’ efforts paid off, but at some cost. On the one hand, a council of western bishops at Serdica in the autumn of 343 found Athanasius innocent of charges against him (a parallel council of Eastern bishops conspicuously did not do the same); and in 345 Constantius allowed him to return from exile after his brother Constans threatened civil war over the matter and the rival bishop Gregory had died (Barnes 1993: 89–91). Athanasius arrived in Alexandria in October 346. On the other hand, Athanasius’ aggressive courtship of Constans would later lead to the charge that he had sowed enmity between the two brother emperors, and during this period his political case and theological views became yoked to those of another eastern bishop exiled to the West, Marcellus of Ancyra. Marcellus’ theology stressed the unity of God to such an extent that he appeared to grant no independent existence to the Son at all: this extreme version of pro-Nicene thought alarmed nearly everyone in the Greek-speaking East, and Athanasius’ association with Marcellus became a liability for him.

The nearly ten years between October 346 and February 356 form the longest period of time in which Athanasius enjoyed possession of his see in Alexandria, and thus they have come to be called the ‘Golden Decade’ by Athanasian scholars. In truth Athanasius’ troubles and triumphs on the international political scene continued unabated, and his real theological influence began to fade as discussion among even bishops inclined to accept Nicaea began to turn to how to speak of the separateness of Father, Son and Holy Spirit within the context of their unity. In 349 a council at Antioch, for which Athanasius prepared a brief that is now basically the *Defence Against the Arians* (Barnes 1993: 98–100, 192–5), condemned and deposed him once again and appointed George of Cappadocia as bishop of Alexandria in his place. But before Constantius could enforce this decision, a more urgent problem confronted the emperor: in the West a revolt by the general Magnentius, whose troops proclaimed him Augustus on 18 January 350, led to the death of his brother Constans. Both Constantius and Magnentius sought Athanasius’ support, the former by giving up on enforcing the deposition of Athanasius (and sending Athanasius a prized letter expressing his support for him), the latter by sending envoys to meet with the patriarch in Alexandria. In public at least Athanasius rebuffed Magnentius’ overtures, but insinuations that he privately courted the usurper would later surface. It took Constantius until the summer of 353 to put down Magnentius’ revolt decisively. That both of these contestants for imperial power found it expedient to



Figure 44.3 The column of Diocletian, originally topped by a statue, erected on a hill in Alexandria to commemorate the emperor’s victory over a rebellion in Egypt in 298 CE. Photo from the Napoleonic *Description de l’Égypte*, Paris, 1808–28.

gain the support of Athanasius testifies to the power and prestige that the Alexandrian patriarch commanded.

Urban violence and literary productivity (353–62 CE)

Once Constantius was firmly in control of the entire empire, East and West, he could more effectively enforce the ecclesiastical policies that he favoured. In a series of councils held at Sirmium, Arles and Milan from 351–5, the emperor coerced even western bishops into condemning and deposing Athanasius. In the midst of these prolonged struggles, Athanasius wrote *On the Council of Nicaea*, in which for the first time he placed that council's term *homoousios* ('of the same essence') at the centre of the debate. Orthodoxy, Athanasius asserted, is adherence to the creed of that council and its language. Still, Constantius moved to enforce the decisions of his councils. In January 356 the military commander Syrianus entered Alexandria with a large number of troops. Brandishing the letter of support that Constantius had written him during Magnentius' revolt, Athanasius denied that the emperor would now wish to remove him. But Syrianus looked for an opportune moment, and on the night of 8–9 February he stormed the Church of Theonas where Athanasius was leading prayers. The bishop escaped, however, with the aid of local monks.

Athanasius spent the next six years in hiding, moving among monastic settlements and local churches in Egypt, Libya, and at times even Alexandria itself. Provided secure cover by his supporters, he was able to intensify his campaign of literary propaganda. He augmented his *Defence Before Constantius*, first composed in 353 (Barnes 1993: 196–7), and wrote a *Defence of His Flight*, the highly invective *History of the Arians*, and his *Letters to Serapion* (the bishop of Thmuis), which defend the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. Ascetic Christians formed an important target of these works: the bishop wrote letters warning them to give no hospitality to his opponents and spreading a grisly account of the death of Arius. He composed the *Life of Anthony*, which portrayed the recently deceased monk as an implacable foe of Arians, Melitians, and all 'heretics', whose spiritual achievements illustrated Athanasius' doctrine of the incarnation of the Word (Brakke 1995: 129–38; Roldanus 1983; Gregg and Groh 1981: 142–53). A masterpiece of Christian literature, the *Life* was soon translated into Latin and many other languages, inspiring imitation of two kinds: subsequent hagiographers used it as a model for their own literary endeavours, and subsequent ascetics used Athanasius' Anthony as a model for their spiritual disciplines (see Chapter 43 of this volume).

If Athanasius' ability to elude arrest and to carry on such literary endeavours for six years represents a noble demonstration of the support he enjoyed among the Christians of Egypt, events in Alexandria provide less edifying evidence of Athanasian strength. The city was plagued with violence. It took the imperial government four months to wrest control of the church buildings from the Athanasian clergy and hand them over to supporters of Athanasius' replacement, George. Bishop George did not feel confident enough to enter the city until February 357; once there he tried to build up a non-Athanasian community, for instance by patronizing the anti-Nicene theologian Aetius, whose student Eunomius became a famous defender of the separateness of the Father and the Son. But George's efforts were in vain: in

August 358 a mob nearly killed him at the Church of Dionysius, and in October he fled the city. The Athanasians regained control of the churches, but by December they were forced out again. It was not until November 361 that George returned to Alexandria, but when news of the death of Constantius, George's supporter, reached the city, he was imprisoned. On 24 December a mob attacked the prison and lynched George.

A gradual withdrawal from the international scene (362–73 CE)

The death of Constantius and the accession of the pagan emperor Julian allowed Athanasius to return to Alexandria in February 362. Shortly thereafter he chaired a small council of bishops, the goal of which was to articulate a basis for unity among supporters of Nicene theology. The divisions among this group were exemplified by the situation in Antioch, where pro-Nicene Christians were divided into moderate and hard-line factions, each with its own bishop. In a document addressed to the Christians in Antioch (*Tomus ad Antiochenos*) in 362, the assembled bishops proposed that adherence to the creed of Nicaea be the sufficient basis for unity and addressed themselves to the controversial term *hypostasis*, which Nicaea had rejected as a way of speaking about the separateness of the Father and Son. They suggested that it was acceptable for pro-Nicene Christians to speak of 'three *hypostaseis*' ('three substances or persons') if they also spoke of the Trinity as *homoousios* ('of one substance or essence') (*Tom.* 5 [PG 26: 800–1]). This point was a major concession on the part of Athanasius, who had dedicated his career to refuting language that spoke of the separate identity of the Son from the Father in such blunt terms. It is likely, as a modern scholar has suggested, that Athanasius accepted this point 'with his teeth clenched' (Barnes 1998: 67, n. 49), but accept it he did and so contributed in a small way to the consensus on the doctrine of God that began to emerge in the 360s and 370s.

After the 362 Council of Alexandria, Athanasius' prominence on the international scene faded as younger men began to do the cutting-edge theology and almost everyone lost interest in matters like chalices broken 30 years earlier. He was forced to retire to the Thebaid briefly under Julian in 362–3 and again under Valens in 365–6. The schism among the Nicenes at Antioch continued, and Athanasius' stubborn loyalty to the smaller hard-line faction became more a hindrance than a help to the Nicene cause in the East. Repeated pleas from Basil of Caesarea in the late 360s and early 370s that Athanasius moderate his position on the Antiochene situation met with silence, for the aged bishop's attention had turned to vexing problems in his Egyptian church, as the *Festal Letters* of 367–70 (see below) and a second letter to virgins demonstrate (*Ep. virg.* 2 [Lebon 1928; trans. Brakke 1995: 292–302]; Brakke 1994a: 27). However, alerted by bishop Epictetus of Corinth that some Christians took the divinity of the Son so seriously that they suggested that even Christ's body was not really human, but *homoousios* with the Word's divine nature, Athanasius eagerly took pen in hand to denounce any such distortion of his position (*Epistula ad Epictetum* [PG 26: 1050–70]). On 2 May 373 the patriarch died.

Athanasius the international politician presents an imposing figure on the stage

of late Roman imperial history, so much so that even the hard-headed Edward Gibbon attributed to him 'a superiority of character and abilities which would have qualified him, far better than the degenerate sons of Constantine, for the government of a great monarchy' (Barnard 1985). The elements for such a picture can be discerned in Athanasius' brilliant deployment of polemics in defence of his case, from which only meticulous scholarship can extract the truth (Barnes 1993); his willingness to use (and then to cover up) violence against his enemies; his courting of and by emperors and would-be emperors; his success in identifying attacks on himself with attacks on Christian orthodoxy; and, above all, his ability to hold onto his episcopal office through nearly forty years of attempts to unseat him. But traces of a less confident, more insecure Athanasius remain: the *Festal Letters*' frequent ruminations on the role of 'afflictions' in the believer's life; the portrayal of Anthony in the *Life* as treating the emperors Constantine, Constans and Constantius with a diffidence that Athanasius could only envy (*V. Ant.* 91 [ed. Bartelink 1994: 366–70]); and the Melitian Callistus' picture of a nervous Athanasius vacillating over whether to depart for the Council of Tyre in 335. In this last instance we may catch a rare glimpse of a young bishop, not yet forty years old, the golden boy of the Alexandrian clergy, caught in an ecclesiastical game in which, thanks to the use of imperial force to enforce conciliar decisions, the stakes had become much higher than they had ever been. Although Athanasius would in this instance be a loser, he eventually learned to play the new game of Constantinian imperial Christianity, and to play it well. But that should not totally erase the image of the 'despondent' young bishop calling for his luggage to be returned in the hope that he could avoid what lay ahead.

THE POWER OF A BISHOP AND THE CREATION OF A CATHOLIC CHURCH

While a player in imperial and ecclesiastical politics on the world stage, Athanasius was always bishop of Alexandria and thus patriarch of Egypt. As other bishops did in their own environments, Athanasius worked to form a unified and dominant church in Egypt, a 'Catholic' church that would be inclusive of diverse persons and dependent on the clerical hierarchy. Both Alexandria and Egypt were the objects of the bishop's efforts as he established and displayed episcopal authority. We have already seen at least three methods of doing this: the annual *Festal Letter* announcing the date of Easter, tours of visitation through the region, and the use of violence and intimidation.

The bishop as patron and ascetic

Within the city of Alexandria (see Figure 44.4) Athanasius worked to establish a dominant presence in the civic space through buildings, rituals, and patronage. Benefiting from the new wealth that came with imperial favour, the church built impressive new buildings in the city, augmented old ones, and took over pagan structures (Haas 1997: 208–12). Under Alexander, the temple of Kronos (Saturn)

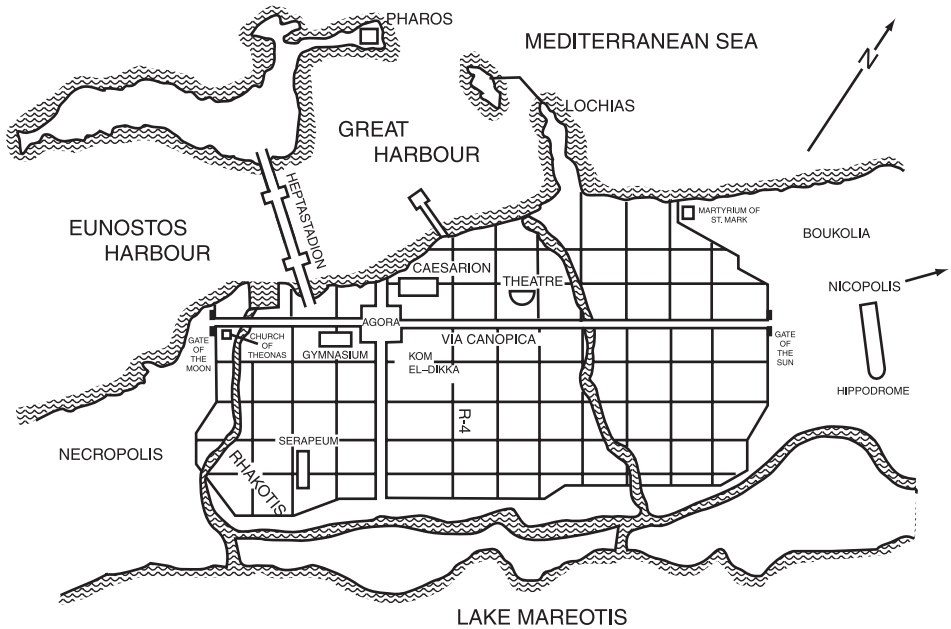


Figure 44.4 Map of Alexandria. Athanasius' headquarters, the Church of Theonas, lay near the western gate. Adapted from Haas (1997: 4), by permission of The Johns Hopkins University Press.

was converted into a church dedicated to St Michael the Archangel, the first major Christian building at the city centre; and the pre-existing Church of Theonas, which was situated just inside the western gate on the Via Canopica, Alexandria's main thoroughfare, was enlarged and ornamented, and became the bishop's headquarters.

In the middle of Athanasius' career (339–46, actually while he was in exile and Gregory was in residence as bishop), Constantius gave to the Christians the Caesarion, a huge complex originally built by Cleopatra (died 30 BCE) that was marked by tall twin obelisks plundered from an ancient Egyptian temple (one of which was still standing when French scholars visited Egypt at the turn of the nineteenth century). The Caesarion had served as the centre for the imperial cult for over three hundred years. This dominating structure became the Great church, the new seat for the bishop. Disgruntled pagans did not take this lightly, however, and treated the chaotic events of 356 as an opportunity to attack the church and try to reclaim it as their own ritual space (Haas 1997: 283–6). Another such attack in 366 required extensive rebuilding with imperial support in 368. Athanasius' final major building project was a church in the north-west section of the city, which he dedicated on 7 August 370 and was later called by his name (*Festal Index* 41–2 [ed. Martin and Albert 1985: 272–4]). Once again it was a pagan temple that was converted to Christian use and was strategically positioned near where sea travellers entered the



Figure 44.5 The Caesarion in Alexandria at the turn of the nineteenth century. From the Napoleonic *Description de l'Égypte*, Paris, 1808–28.

city. The built landscape of Alexandria began to reflect the prestige and wealth of the church and its bishop.

In these impressive major buildings and in the numerous local parish churches, a regular ritual calendar bound Christians together and broadcast their communal life to others. The annual celebration of Holy Week and Easter, the Christian *Pasch*, was the most important of these liturgical events. Athanasius expended considerable energy trying to standardize Alexandrian practices associated with Lent and Easter (Brakke 1998: 460–2). The numbers of worshippers at Easter became so large that Athanasius had to move services into the new Great church before it was dedicated: the press of the crowds in the smaller buildings caused not only children and old women, but even young men to faint (*Apologia ad Constantium* 14–15 [Szymuziak 1958: 102–4]).

These buildings were also headquarters for the bishop's system of patronage, which formed only one aspect of a complicated socio-economic web in which the fourth-century bishop played a leading role. In a society marked by extreme disparities in wealth and social power, patron-client relationships promoted social cohesion and secured patterns of inequality as powerful persons dispensed benefits to their inferiors, who in turn owed their patrons honour through publicly expressed gratitude and concrete political support (Saller 1982). The Christian bishop bestowed not only material, but also spiritual benefits on ordinary Christians (Bobertz 1993), and at times acted as a 'broker' between them and even higher powers, the emperor and God (Moxnes 1991: 248–9).

In the case of Athanasius, imperial subsidies for the church and the needy in Egypt and Libya, such as allotments of grain, were channelled through the bishop of Alexandria, who in turn enjoyed some ability to requisition supplies for charitable purposes. Some of the charges against Athanasius revolved around his powers in this area (Barnes 1993: 178–9). In addition to imperial funds, contributions from wealthier church members went to the bishop, who then distributed them to the poor, widows, and ascetic Christians. Local bishops and clergy were tied to the patriarch not only by this welfare system, but also by their exemptions from costly civic offices: one way the government could coerce clergy into supporting either Athanasius or one of his rivals was by determining to which patriarch clergy must adhere in order to receive the exemption. In turn, it was the patriarch who determined what adherence to him meant practically. Athanasius, then, stood at the centre of a complex system of financial dependencies and privileges that bound together lay and clergy, prosperous and poor Christians.

Such day-to-day power rarely surfaces in the historical record, but the few instances are revealing. Athanasius reports being charged that he threatened to prevent grain from being shipped from Alexandria to Constantinople (*Apologia contra Arianos* 87.1 [PG 25: 405]), and there are indeed indications that the patriarch enjoyed a special patron-client relationship with Christian ship captains and sailors, who were engaged in intense rivalry with Jewish competitors (Haas 1997: 116–18). New regulations under Constantine gave the patriarch some control over the city's guilds (Brown 1992: 102). When the government turned over Alexandrian churches to rivals of Athanasius in 339 and 356, conflicts over the welfare system turned violent. In 356, according to Athanasius, when his supporters lost control of the churches, they tried to keep supplying widows and poor with food and money in other locations, while the opposing clergy tried to force the aid recipients back into the churches and onto their dole by 'striking them on their feet' (*Historia Arianorum* 61 [ed. Opitz 1935–41: 217]; Brakke 1995: 190–1). What these rival clerical organizations were after was not only the political support of the indigent themselves, but the ability to present themselves to the governing elite and the wider populace as the protectors of and spokesmen for 'the poor' (Brown 1992: 89–103).

Often among those dependent on the bishop for economic aid were ascetic Christians: forging strong connections between the institutional church and the diverse ascetic movements was one of Athanasius' most important goals in creating a unified Egyptian church (Brakke 1995). The variety of ascetic Christians required a variety of strategies. Many of the Alexandrian virgins of his day were literate and independent women who formed celibate relationships with ascetic men, made pilgrimages to Jerusalem, and became involved in the theological discussions surrounding 'Arianism'; thus, Athanasius urged them to reject 'Arian' teachings and to model their lives after the reclusive and submissive young Virgin Mary. As 'brides of Christ', they were to behave like wives: silent, withdrawn, and obedient to male authority figures. In contrast, he tried to rally the male monks of Upper Egypt to a more politicized pro-Athanasian disposition: he recruited monks to serve in his clergy, and he exhorted them to withhold hospitality and communion from anti-Athanasian monks. He wrote letters to monks instructing them on proper ascetic

practices and occasionally intervened in the sometimes confused authority structure of the huge Pachomian monastic federation. The *Life of Anthony* was his definitive portrait of ascetic Christianity in league with Athanasian teachings and institutions. Athanasius positioned himself as the patron of ordinary Christians and the leader of ascetic Christians.

Continuing conflicts

Athanasius' relentless and persuasive propaganda, his theological clarity and embrace of monasticism, and his financial clout enabled him to achieve a great deal of success in creating a unified Egyptian church out of the divisions that confronted him at the beginning of his episcopate. After the bloody clashes of the late 350s, the anti-Athanasian forces in the city of Alexandria (the 'Arians', he would say) appear to have been greatly weakened. In Upper Egypt, the Melitian church steadily lost ground, so that by the late 360s Melitian clergy and monks had no real ecclesiastical organization to speak of (Barnes 1993: 95–6; Camplani 1989: 262–82). But the aspects of Egyptian Christianity from which these conflicts stemmed – a rich tradition of intellectual speculation in the cities, and a tendency among Upper Egyptian Christians to develop their own modes of spirituality without Alexandrian control – did not disappear. In *Festal Letters* from late in his career (367–70), Athanasius confronts these problematic trends and tries to stigmatize them by labelling them with the old epithets 'Arian' and 'Melitian'.

The 39th *Festal Letter* for 367 addressed the issue of scripture in the official church by enumerating a list of 'canonical' books that are 'inspired by God', sketching a short list of early Christian works that are 'useful for instruction' (e.g., the popular *Shepherd of Hermas*), and denouncing certain 'apocryphal' books attributed to Enoch, Moses and Isaiah (Joannou 1963: 2.71–6; Lefort 1955: 16–22, 58–62; Coquin 1984: 135–58; trans. Brakke 1995: 326–32). The letter, famous because it is the first Christian document to list precisely the 27 books that now comprise the New Testament, promulgated a biblical canon suited to the hierarchical episcopate as a means of attacking two competing modes of authority (Brakke 1994b). On the one hand, Athanasius assailed Christian 'teachers' who offered their own 'evil thoughts' rather than repeating only the doctrines of 'Christ the Teacher', found in the canonical books. In this way the bishop attacked yet again the kind of independent teaching authority that Arius had exercised and his predecessor Alexander had tried to squash. On the other hand, Athanasius accused 'the Melitians' of publishing such fraudulent works as the *Testament of Moses*, which promoted revelations to martyrs as means of access to truth apart from Christ. The promotion of a set canon bolstered episcopal authority based in parish churches.

In his letter for 368 (no. 40), Athanasius complained about irregular ordinations of priests and bishops in Upper Egypt (Lefort 1955: 22–3; Coquin 1984: 144–6; trans. Brakke 1995: 332–4, cf. 100–2). Some Christians, he claimed, were 'electing clergy for other dioceses that are not theirs'. What appears to have been in dispute was the balance between local and Alexandrian interests in the election of bishops. This problem lay at the origin of the Melitian schism: despite the decline of an organized Melitian network, Egyptian bishops still sought a greater role in the

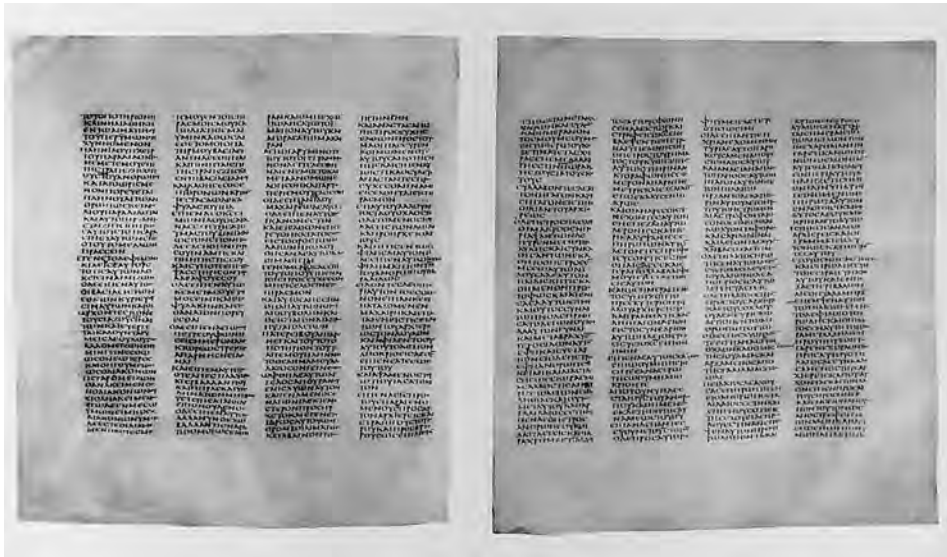


Figure 44.6 Codex Sinaiticus, the earliest surviving manuscript of the complete New Testament, dated to the fourth century and possibly produced in Alexandria. By permission of the British Library, Add. MS. 43725. ff.244v–245.

selection of their neighbouring colleagues, at the expense of patriarchal control and thus, in Athanasius' view, of 'good order'.

Finally, in 369–70, Athanasius used his 41st and 42nd *Festal Letters* to condemn a number of practices associated with the developing cult of the martyrs (Lefort 1955: 23–6, 62–4; Coquin 1984: 146–52; trans. Brakke 1998: 486–93). Certain Christians ('Melitians') were, according to Athanasius, exhuming the bodies of martyrs and carrying them out of 'the cemeteries of the catholic church' to set up independent martyr shrines. At these shrines, demons were exorcised, and divination was offered, as the martyrs' spirits would answer people's questions by speaking through a possessed person or forcing a demon to speak. Christians who availed themselves of these services made financial contributions to the shrine. Such activity infuriated Athanasius, who insisted that all power to combat the demonic and to reveal the truth belonged to Christ alone. To his mind, these shrines were a deceptive means to 'lead astray' Christians, to seduce them from the Catholic church where 'the Word of God speaks from heaven' to follow merely 'those who speak from earth'.

These letters, written at a time when Athanasius' involvement in international politics had waned considerably, reveal that even at the end of his episcopate the patriarch had to work hard to create a unified, dominant, and episcopally centred church in Egypt. His efforts, ranging from building new churches to distributing aid to the needy to establishing a canon of the Bible, illustrate the ways in which fourth-century bishops created a new 'catholic' church in the era between Constantine and Theodosius.

THE POWER OF THE WORD AND THE CREATION OF A CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

Such a catholic church, one that embraced society and culture rather than stood in opposition to them, required a theology that was also 'catholic', that is, inclusive of and intelligible to persons of a wide variety of social roles and at diverse levels of spiritual perfection. It is usual to characterize Athanasius' theology as 'biblical' or 'dogmatic', rather than 'philosophical' or 'systematic'. 'There was', one scholar has written, 'something un-Greek about him' (von Campenhausen 1959: 70). What this means is that, unlike such versatile theologians as Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine, Athanasius' thought is not wide-ranging or considered in its use of philosophical distinctions and concepts. Instead, Athanasius focused with laser-beam intensity on a single idea: the fully divine Word of God became incarnate in human flesh to save humanity from sin and death. In his justly famous formulation, the Word 'became human, so that we may become divine' (*de Incarnatione* 54 [ed. Thomson 1971: 268]). His theological writings, forged mostly in the heat of ecclesiastical conflict, defend and expound this fundamental conviction by specifying the identity of this Word and the necessity and benefits of his incarnation.

If there is any philosophical concept at the heart of Athanasius' thought, it is the distinction between Creator and created, between the eternal, unchanging God and his contingent, changeable creation.⁴ He was a relentless critic of traditional Egyptian religiosity, such as that centring on the Nile, which was the heart of the social, economic, and religious life of ancient Egypt (see Figure 44.7): 'If a person sinks to the nature of the waters and reckons them to be a god, as the Egyptians worship the water, let him see their nature being transformed by him (the Word of God) and recognize that the Lord is their creator' (*de Incarnatione* 45 [ed. Thomson 1971: 248], referring to Mark 4:35–41).

For Athanasius, moreover, there are no gradations of divine being: thus, the Son of God must be either fully divine or fully created. As Son, however, God's Word is not created, but 'begotten', of the same 'essence' (*ousia*) or 'nature' (*physis*) as the Father's, just as human fathers do not create sons that are of a different nature from themselves, but beget them as like themselves in every way. But God the Father, as eternal and unchanging, could not have become a father at some point in time: rather, God is always Father of the Son (*Ep. Serap.* 1.16 [PG 26: 568–9]). It is of God's nature as life-giving fountain and source to be Father and Son (*Ar.* 1.14, 19, 24; 2.32; *Ep. Serap.* 2.2 [PG 26: 40–1, 49–53, 213–17, 611–12]). The Word of God, in turn, does not become a son based on his exceptional virtue or his perseverance in clinging to the Father: he is eternally the Son, the Word, Wisdom, Power, and Will of the Father. God does not choose to be Father, Son, or Spirit: the Trinity is a matter of God's nature, not of his will, for God cannot be anything other than who and what he is. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are 'indivisible' (*Ep. Serap.* 1.17 [PG 26: 569]). Athanasius has little to say about how they are different.

Human beings, in contrast, were created by God out of nothing and have bodies that are vulnerable to corruption and death. Although Athanasius took over his Alexandrian predecessor Origen's notion of the eternal begetting of the Son, he eschewed Origen's idea that human beings originated as 'intellects', which became

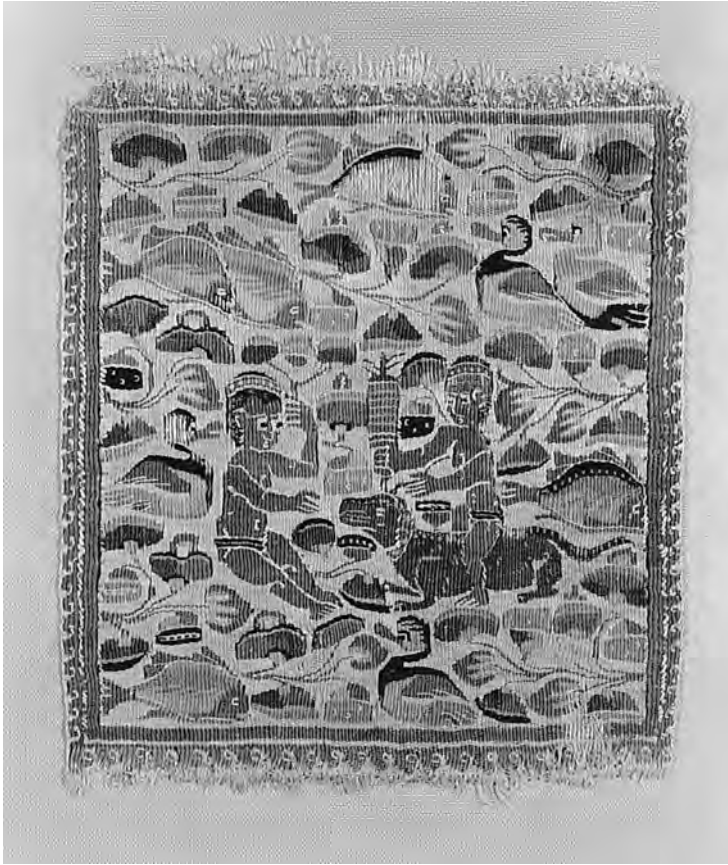


Figure 44.7 Egyptian tapestry of the Nile, from the fourth or fifth century, showing two putti, part of the entourage of the river god Nilos and symbolic of the river's fertility, playing among fish and ducks. By permission of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of George F. Baker, 1890, 90.5.825.

souls and acquired bodies when they turned away from God. Instead, Athanasius' original human beings were already embodied intellects (Brakke 1995: 148–9). Because the original human beings had rational faculties, they could contemplate God through his Word, thanks to God's grace; but because they also had bodies, which were corruptible and the sources of 'pleasure' and 'desire', they were changeable and could fall away from this attention to God. This, of course, they did: people failed to persevere in renunciation of the body and adherence to God. Instead, through a 'lack of attention' to God, human beings became subject to the now disordered pleasures of the body, inclined towards selfish desires, and vulnerable to the corruption and death that was natural to their bodies. Fear of death and the loss of pleasures resulted in an accelerating inclination towards sin and an inability to reverse course and return to virtue and contemplation of God (*Contra Gentes* 2–4; *de Incarnatione* 4–5 [ed. Thomson 1971: 4–12, 142–6]).

It is crucial to note the ascetic character of Athanasius' vision, which places the proper control of the body and its passions at the centre of the human plight. Human beings could have enjoyed blessed immortality if they had persevered in attention to God and discipline of the body. Fallen human beings, however, are enslaved to the passions of the body, unable to know God truly, and vulnerable to the devil and his demons. Only the incarnation of the fully divine Word of God could solve these problems. By assuming an ordinary human body, the incarnate Word, unchangeable in virtue and invulnerable to the passions, conquered the destabilizing 'movements' of the body, such as lust, avarice and fear (Badger 1990). As the Word perfectly controlled his assumed body and remained unaffected by its passions, he transformed the body itself, rendering it incorruptible, both morally and physically: the Word's unwavering guidance divinized the flesh. Moral courage and disciplined control of the body were now possible for human beings because they shared a 'kinship of the flesh' with the Word's assumed body (*Ar.* 2.69 [*PG* 26: 293]). The key mechanism of salvation is not, as it had been with Origen (*Exhortation to Martyrdom* 47; *de Principiis* 1.1.7), the human intellect or soul's 'kinship' with the eternal Word, but the human body's 'kinship' with the incarnate Word's flesh.

Still, the Word's role as teacher of humanity has not disappeared. The incarnation was necessary also because humanity's knowledge of God had to be renewed. Since people were now attuned to their bodily senses, only the appearance of the unchanging image of God in a body could re-educate them about God (*Inc.* 13–16 [ed. Thomson 1971: 164–72]). This renewed knowledge of God remains available in the scriptures, in which the unmediated voice of the Word continues to speak his teachings (*Ep. fest.* 39 [ed. Lefort 1955: 16]). But in Athanasius the element of struggle and resistance is always present: the climax of the incarnation is the death and resurrection of the Word's body, which made manifest Christ's triumph over the corrupting passions of the body and represented the definitive victory over Satan and his airborne demons: 'The Lord came to cast down the devil, clear the air, and prepare our way up to heaven' (*Inc.* 25 [ed. Thomson 1971: 194]).⁵ Christians now could advance towards heaven by resisting the demons through determined moral effort (*Life of Anthony* 65–6 [ed. Bartelink 1994: 304–10]).

One of the most controversial features of Athanasius' theology is precisely how he imagined the union of humanity and divinity in Christ. Towards the end of his career and in the years following his death, an admirer of Athanasius, Apollinaris of Laodicea, taught that the Word of God simply replaced the human mind and soul in the incarnate Christ: what was human about Christ was only his body. At the Council of Alexandria in 362, Athanasius agreed in contrast that Christ had a human body and soul (*Tom.* 7 [*PG* 26: 804–5]), but his usual instinct was to attribute the passions – not only desires like lust, but also emotions like fear – to the body and thus to the flesh that the Word of God assumed. The logic seems to be that, while in ordinary human beings the body's passions affect and disorient the soul, in Christ they were powerless against the embodied Word and thus were 'extinguished'. Any human soul that Christ may have possessed plays little if any role. Rather than assessing Athanasius' thought on this point against some later standard of orthodoxy, it may be best to appreciate his distinctive views on the body,

the passions, and the benefits of the incarnation within his own symbolic world-view.

Since they have free will, human beings are able to appropriate the benefits of the Word's incarnation in a disciplined life of 'thanksgiving' (*Epp. fest.* 3.2–5; 6.3; 10.5 [ed. Cureton 1848: 27–31, 42–3, 47]): 'We sail on this sea by our own free will, as though by a wind, for everyone is carried where it his will [to go]. Either, when the Word is navigating, one enters into rest, or, when pleasure is in control, one suffers shipwreck and is endangered by the storm' (*Ep. fest.* 19.7 [ed. Cureton 1848: 45*]). Christians achieve a 'withdrawal' from the pleasures of the world and ascend to heaven through acts of bodily renunciation, attention to the scriptures, and reception of the sacraments (*Epp. fest.* 6.11–12 [ed. Cureton 1848: 5*–6*]; 24 [=2] [ed. Lefort 1955: 37–42]). Thus, all Christians, in Athanasius' view, are ascetics, but at different levels of intensity. The monk Anthony was so 'navigated by the Word' that his body already displayed the divinizing transformation that the incarnation made possible (*V. Ant.* 14 [ed. Bartelink 1994: 172–4]). Monks and virgins could imitate Anthony's perfectionism: their complete virginity exemplified the freedom to pursue virtue that the Word enables (*Gent.* 26; *Inc.* 48, 50, 51 [ed. Thomson 1971: 68, 254, 260, 262]; *Ep. virg.* 1.8, 23 [ed. Lefort 1955: 76, 84]). But most Christians disciplined their bodies in a much more moderate way: through occasional fasting and sexual abstinence, through charity to the poor, and through study of the scriptures (*Epp. fest. passim*; Brakke 1995: 182–98). The parish-centred, episcopal Christianity that Athanasius promoted was an inclusive, diverse community: like the hundredfold, sixtyfold, and thirtyfold produce of the field in the Parable of the Sower (*Matt.* 13:1–8), the faithful Christians nourished by the Word were not 'uniform', but 'various and rich' (*Ep. fest.* 10.4 [ed. Cureton, in Burgess 1854: 146]).

Athanasius' thought, then, is best not thought of as 'biblical' in contrast to 'philosophical' or 'Platonist'; rather, it is social, ecclesiastical, and 'Catholic' in the sense of articulating the shared life of an imperially favoured church made up of diverse people and guided by the bishop (Lyman 1993: 159). It is in the church, in its rituals, teachings, scriptures, and social practices, that the power of the incarnate Word to transform sinful humanity is mediated to believers.

A TRANSITIONAL FIGURE

Although many of his modern students admire Athanasius without reservation, most approach this giant of the fourth century with ambivalence. His courage and perseverance in defending what he believed to be Christian truth cannot be denied, but these noble qualities were accompanied by a violence in his thought and action that are at the very least disquieting. Few theologians have articulated so eloquently the Christian conviction that God became human in the incarnation of Christ, but the details of his exposition and his inability to speak convincingly of how the Father and Son are separate leave much of his thought unsatisfying. His ecclesiastical policies within Egypt aimed to produce a church inclusive of persons with diverse social roles and identities, but at the cost of certain attractive traditions of Egyptian religious life, such as intellectual freedom. The ambiguities of Athanasius'

legacy may best be understood in terms of his own position as a liminal figure in Christian history, temporally and geographically.

Temporally, Athanasius' career spanned the tumultuous decades between Constantine's decision to legalize and patronize the Christian church and Theodosius' establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman empire (Barnes 1993: 165–82). Although imperial and ecclesiastical politics intertwined during this period, they were not identical. Thanks in part to privileges granted by Constantine, bishops enjoyed their own sources of power, independent of that of the emperor. Councils of bishops met at times under the aegis of the emperor, at other times not; the emperor enforced the decisions of such councils, but usually did not make them. How exactly church and state should interact were, in many ways, up for grabs in this period. For his part, Athanasius scrambled to take full advantage of the possibilities and ambiguities opened up by the post-Constantinian situation, exercising his new episcopal powers with a desperate roughness that reflects their novelty. The clarity of Theodosian Nicene orthodoxy did not yet exist.

Likewise, Athanasius stood between East and West at a time when these two traditions in Christianity were increasingly going their separate ways. A Greek speaker and writer, trained in the Origenist tradition of Alexandrian Christian thought, Athanasius none the less found support for his theological views mainly in the Latin West. He would leave a complicated theological legacy to both Greek and Latin Christianity. His conception of salvation as divinization of the flesh and exercise of humanity's free will in pursuit of virtue would eventually fail to resonate with Latin theologians indebted to Augustine, but became a hallmark of eastern orthodox thought. Similarly, in the West Athanasius' emphasis on the unity of God and thus the full divinity of the Son became synonymous with orthodox faith, as the Athanasian Creed demonstrates, but the logic of his incarnational thought, as followed by his Alexandrian successors like Cyril and Dioscorus, would become the focus of heated controversy in the East (while his reputation remained intact). Athanasius, this man of contradictions, may be the last great Church Father to whom both the Latin West and the Greek East may lay claim with equal justice.

NOTES

- 1 Most of the dates and movements of Athanasius are supplied by two ancient sources: an index to the Syriac translation of Athanasius' *Festal Letters* and a chronicle of Athanasius' career compiled by the Alexandrian see called the *Historia acephala* (both found in Martin and Albert 1985). Still, many of the facts of Athanasius' career, including the dates, locations, and even reality of many events, are notoriously difficult to recover out of a tangled web of contradictory and tendentious sources. For the most part I have followed the judgements of two recent studies: Martin (1996) and especially Barnes (1993), a brilliant and painstaking reconstruction of Athanasius' political career. Readers interested in the documentation and evaluation of the primary evidence that lies behind my narrative should consult these works.
- 2 Alexandria was geographically and socially distinct from the rest of Roman Egypt. The Melitian Schism originated in efforts by bishops of Upper Egypt (that is, southern Egypt, upstream on the Nile), led by Melitius of Lycopolis, to gain some independence

from the patriarch of Alexandria. When he became bishop in 328, Athanasius made tours of Egyptian churches to solidify support for himself in the face of Melitian opposition.

- 3 The dating of this masterpiece is highly controversial among Athanasian scholars. In truth, any date between 325 and 337 seems possible.
- 4 I use masculine pronouns to refer to God advisedly, since in my view they reflect how Athanasius thought. The best recent succinct exposition of Athanasius' theology is Lyman (1993: 124–59); see also Petterson (1995) and Roldanus (1968).
- 5 The idea that Christ's death was a substitutionary sacrifice for the guilt of sin is present in Athanasius (e.g., *Inc.* 37; *Ar.* 1.60), but it is by no means central to his thought, which sees the entire incarnation event as salvific.

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JOHN CHRYSOSTOM



Pauline Allen and Wendy Mayer

JOHN IN CONTEXT: A STUDY IN COMPLEXITY

Biographic outline

For a figure of the importance of John Chrysostom, it is surprising that although we know that he was born in Syrian Antioch (see Figure 45.1), on the Orontes, his birthdate is unknown, although it fell some time in the period 340–50 CE (Kelly 1995: 296–8). He was from a well-off family and in his youth studied philosophy, and probably learned rhetoric from the famous sophist Libanius. At the age of 18, however, he transferred his attentions for three years to Meletius the Confessor, an Armenian then in charge of one faction of the Nicene Antiochene church, who saw in him promise of great things to come. During this period he also began studying asceticism and theology. Hankering after a more extreme ascetic life, he then withdrew to the mountains outside Antioch and lived with an old hermit for four years, before spending two years of even more rigorous mortification in a cave, largely on his own (Palladius, *Dialogue* 5). He returned to Antioch and was ordained a deacon in 381 by Meletius and a priest in 386 by bishop Flavian. He held this second office from 386–97, in the process establishing a reputation as one of the greatest orators the church has ever known. For much of this period Theodosius I was emperor in Constantinople. Indeed, in 387, when the actions of a mob in mutilating the statues of the imperial family in Antioch had led Theodosius to consider destroying the city entirely, Chrysostom delivered a particularly magnificent series of homilies (*De statuis*) to strengthen the Antiochene faithful.

This happy phase of his life ended in September 397, when Nectarius, the patriarch of Constantinople, died and John was chosen to succeed him. An apparently unwilling Chrysostom was eventually installed in Constantinople and set about reforming the city and the clergy. He proved to be a round peg in a square hole, not always operating according to the imperial realities of the capital and alienating many of the clergy, monks and members of the elite through his fiery temper and strong language and action. The empress Eudoxia, the real power behind Arcadius' throne, alternately supported and became alienated from him. His actions in 401 in having six Asian bishops who had been guilty of simony deposed intensified the

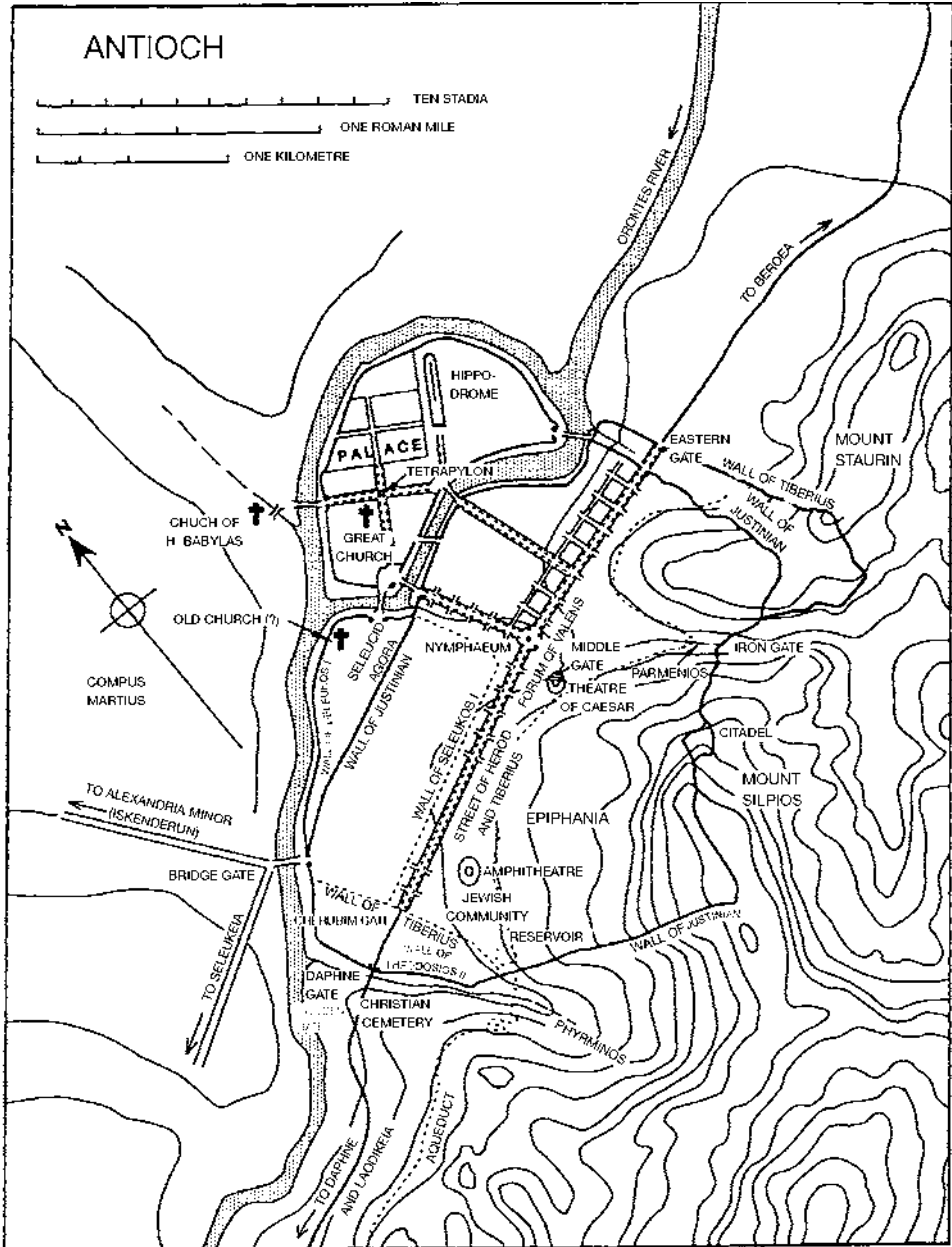


Figure 45.1 Antioch-on-the-Orontes, although in John's time the walls of Theodosius II and Justinian did not exist. From Downey, (1961). Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press (as adapted in Kelly 1995).

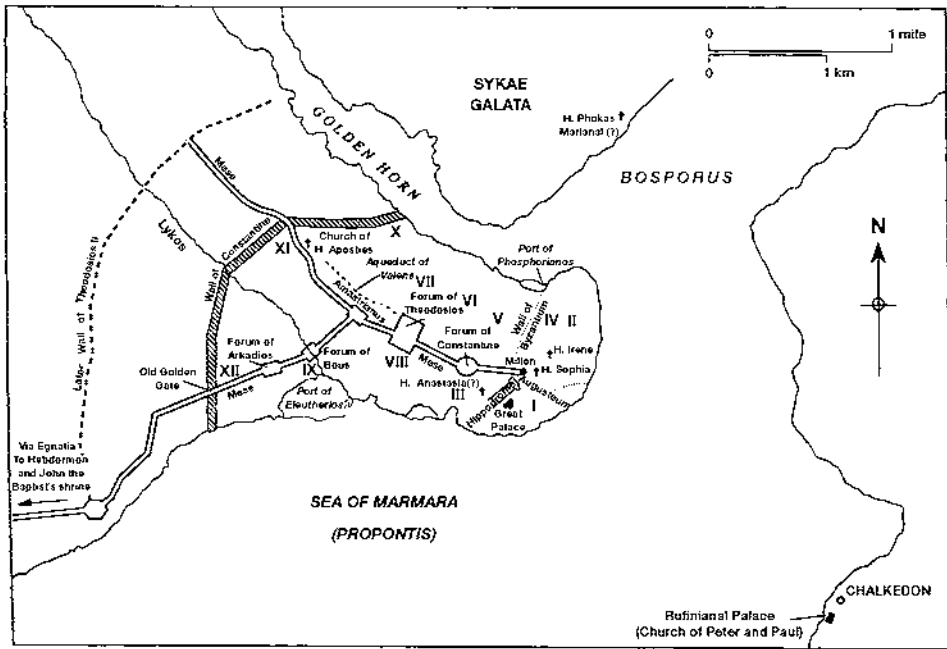


Figure 45.2 Constantinople *c.* 400 CE. From Kelly (1995), with the permission of the publisher, Gerald Duckworth & Co.

pressure to get rid of him. After various other developments, too numerous to mention here, he was, on 20 June 404, exiled from Constantinople to Cucusus in Lesser Armenia, where he remained for three years. But his troubles were not over. Since many of his former flock from Antioch visited him in Cucusus, his enemies in Constantinople saw to it that he was exiled to a more remote place, Pityus on the Eastern shore of the Black Sea. As it turned out, however, he died on the journey there, at Comana in Pontus, on 14 September 407.

Understanding John Chrysostom

John Chrysostom, who has left a more extensive literary legacy than any of the other Greek Fathers, has been one of the most studied figures in early Christianity. Mostly, however, he has been approached from a theological/spiritual standpoint (for example, Meyer 1933), or historical/chronological perspective, as demonstrated by two influential twentieth-century biographies, those by Chrysostomus Baur (1929–30) and Kelly (1995). The latter approach has resulted in a compartmentalized treatment, whereby John is considered against the background of Antioch, where he was monk and presbyter, and then in the context of Constantinople, where he was bishop from 398–404 CE; he is viewed from various perspectives as ascetic, preacher, bishop, pastor, and master of the spiritual life, without a systematic attempt to integrate all these facets; or his homilies and letters are used for establishing the

chronology of political and other events of the late fourth century and early fifth. The main profiles of John Chrysostom which have appeared before this have usually one of two failings. Either, in the case of Baur's biography, we find a hagiographic slant in which he is presented as a saintly man much wronged by his time – a view heavily influenced by the fact that John Chrysostom was in later centuries elevated to the status of a saint of the Eastern church, or else there is a failure to address adequately the psychology of the subject, who then, as in Kelly's study, becomes a politically naive and harsh authoritarian who alienated the nobility, the empress Eudoxia, and many of his clergy in Constantinople. There have also been charges of misogyny levelled against him. It is our aim in this chapter to cut through some of these characterizations and to approach John Chrysostom in an integrated fashion, such that his profile will be that of an individual in his cultural setting, and of a complex man in a complex society. In order to allow the person to come to the fore, John will be viewed through his interactions with different individuals and levels in the society in which he operated during various phases of his life and in various capacities or roles (cf. Mayer and Allen 2000).

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM'S SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

A preliminary note about sources

At the outset a word needs to be said about the considerable literary sources at our disposal for this view of John. Not only have nearly one thousand of his homilies survived whole or in part, but over two hundred and forty letters of his have come down to us, the great bulk of which he wrote during his time in exile (Delmaire 1991). In the case of the homilies it is often impossible to determine whether they were delivered during his presbyterate in Antioch or during his patriarchate in Constantinople (Allen and Mayer 1994, 1995a, 1995b; Mayer 1996), many of them are available only in editions which date back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (see Malingrey 1973), and the definition of the corpus of homilies authentic to John is still not absolute (Voicu 1996). The preponderance of other evidence illustrates John's life in the capital and in exile: the church histories of Socrates and Sozomen, the anonymous *Life of Olympias*, selected orations of Gregory Nazianzen and the same author's *Carmen de vita sua*, the homilies of Severian of Gabala, the biography of John by a so-called Martyrius, and Palladius' *Dialogus de vita Iohannis Chrysostomi* (see Kelly 1995: 291–5). Incidental information from liturgical or archaeological sources can also be used with caution to supplement the literary sources. Despite this plethora of material, which also includes ten or more treatises that survive from the period of his diaconate, there is very little evidence that would enable us to draw a responsible portrait of John prior to his ordination as presbyter and even for much of his presbyterate.

John Chrysostom's close relationships

Women deacons

We consider first his interactions in close relationships, as bishop John seems to have worked closely with a surprising number of women deacons attached to the churches in Constantinople (Mayer 1999: 270–4). The most famous of these, because the relationship is the best documented, was the aristocratic ascetic, Olympias, who had founded a monastery at some point during the episcopate of John's predecessor, Nectarius. The closeness which existed between John and Olympias is attested in the 17 surviving letters which John wrote to her (*Epistulae* 1–17; SC 13 bis) – unfortunately hers have not come down to us – and in her anonymous biography (*Vita Olympiadis*) and Palladius' biography of Chrysostom. John is said to have been the only male allowed to enter the premises of Olympias' ascetic establishment, which abutted the Great church and had its own private passage feeding directly into the church's narthex. His visits are said to have been made regularly, perhaps even on a daily basis, for the purpose of instructing her and her ascetic companions (*Vita Olymp.* 6, 8; SC 13 bis.418.1–7, 422.5–9). Indeed we know that three sisters, Palladia, Elisanthia and Martyria, relatives of Olympias, were ordained by John as deaconesses, which implies some form of prior instruction and ongoing supervision by the bishop (*Vita Olymp.* 7; SC 13 bis.420.6–9). Olympias sent across to John in the *patriarcheion* or bishop's palace the monies required for his day-to-day expenses (*Vita Olymp.* 8; SC 13 bis.422.12–6). She may also have had meals sent across to him, and either arranged to have his laundry done or did it herself (Nicephorus Callistus, in Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 13.24. PG 146, 1012).

When, in 404, John was about to depart for exile the second time, although he farewelled the assembled bishops in the bishop's palace, he moved into the *baptisterion* to take his leave separately of all the deaconesses – Olympias, Pentadia and Procla, with the widow Silvina, according to Palladius (*Dialogue* 10; SC 341.206.34–208.67; see Liebeschuetz 1984: 108). John arranged to have a presbyter lead the weeping women from the premises in order to prevent them stirring up the crowd, a precaution which suggests that, in the minds of the people of Constantinople, the women were intimately associated with the bishop. It is noteworthy, too, that it was not just Olympias but also Pentadia who was arrested and charged with setting fire to the Great church as a protest against John's departure into exile (see *Ep.* 94); the inference is that his relationship with these women was perceived by the hostile authorities too as being particularly close (Mayer 1999: 272–3). From Letter 104 we learn that Pentadia had intended to make the arduous journey to see John in exile at Cucusus, but that John dissuaded her because he seemed to have regarded her presence in Constantinople as vital to his own rehabilitation in the city. Similarly, Sabiniana, John's elderly aunt, a much-respected deaconess from Antioch, in fact arrives at Cucusus on the same day as John, declaring her intention to follow him wherever he is sent: she had heard rumours that he was being deported to Scythia, and would have gone there, if necessary, as we learn from Letter 6 (13). The relationship with Sabiniana proves that John had close contact with at least one woman of similar ecclesiastical status and character to Olympias prior to his arrival in Constan-

tinople. Furthermore, the correspondence which he conducted in exile with Adolia, Carteria, Asyncritia, Chalcidia and Bassiana (e.g., *Epp.* 33, 52, 18, 227, 232, 29, 60, 43), all Antiochene women of some wealth and status, leads one to suspect that when he arrived in Constantinople in late 397 John was not without experience of the kind of wealthy, aristocratic women whom he was to encounter there. The attentions of Carteria, in particular, can be said in some ways to rival those of Olympias: she sends John medication, which she herself has prepared (*Ep.* 34; PG 52.629.5–15 *a.i.*), and another gift, which may have been monetary (*Ep.* 232; PG 52.738–9), while John himself is at greater pains than usual to assure her that in refusing the gift he holds her in no lesser esteem (see further Delmaire 1997: 305).

The clergy

While we are not informed in such detail about John's close relationships with his clergy, the manuscript tradition of the homilies on Paul's letter to the Hebrews attributes to the Antiochene presbyter Constantius their reworking into a published series on the basis of notes taken in shorthand, and we know that Constantius travelled to Cucusus to be with John in his exile (*Ep.* 6 [13]). In fact, Constantius seems to have spent a great deal of time with John there, and to have been instrumental in supervising John's concerns in his absence, at least outside Constantinople (Delmaire 1997: 304). Like Olympias, Constantius rates a special mention in Palladius' *Dialogue* (*Dial.* 16; SC 341.308.64–312.109), and it is clear in Letter 62 that he has just been with John and is on his way back to the Antiochene presbyters to whom John is writing. Among these presbyters there is a group around Diophantes to whom John writes several warm letters from exile, which suggests a close relationship of long standing between them (*Epp.* 222, 239–41). Delmaire (1997: 306–9) provides useful detail concerning John's correspondence also with non-clerical men and women at both Constantinople and in Syria during the period of his exile and concludes that, with rare exceptions, the relationships with individuals in Syria were of longer standing and therefore more enduring.

Here we see Chrysostom most closely associated with family, and with select men from among the clergy at Antioch and select women from among the deacons with whom he worked at Constantinople. There is also some suggestion of long-standing relationships with lay men and women in Syria. Since the available sources regarding this aspect of his person date predominantly from the period of his exile and from his episcopate at Constantinople, however, it is difficult to determine to what extent this picture is representative. Kelly (1995: 16–7, 57) would also have the younger John working and associating closely at Antioch with both bishop Meletius and bishop Flavian, when lector and presbyter. He suggests too that in his late teens or early twenties John was part of a close circle of young men of like background who experimented with the ascetic life (1995: 18–20). Several of the members of this circle seem to have entered the monastic life or the priesthood. Given that the greater portion of his life was spent in the service of the Nicene church it is not unreasonable to suppose that John's closest and most enduring relationships were with men and women who were either themselves ordained or who worked closely with him in his ministry.

The royal court

As bishop of the imperial capital John had *ex officio* contacts with the royal couple, the emperor Arcadius and the empress Eudoxia (*Nov. hom.* 2–3 [CPG 444.1.1–2]; Kelly 1995: 128). We know that on a state occasion, the anniversary of the death of Theodosius I, John delivered a panegyric in the church of the Holy Apostles in the presence of Arcadius and Eudoxia (*Nov. hom.* 6). It is also probable that in a solemn ceremony on 6 January 402 he baptized the couple's only son, Theodosius II (*Sermo post reditum* [PG 52.445.37–52]; Wenger 1952: 52–4). In the third Homily on Acts he suggests that as bishop he was treated at court with special reverence (PG 60.41. 6–10). About the relations between bishop and empress we have a substantial amount of complex information, but John's interaction with Arcadius cannot be gauged with any certainty, whether because of the emperor's alleged lack of character and decisiveness, or his carefully managed and therefore anonymous role, or the bias of the sources. We know, however, that John was not afraid to make his opinion known to the emperor regarding certain decisions (Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.6; Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 8.4; Theodoret of Cyprus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.32), or to resist the soldiers sent to carry out Arcadius' decree when it conflicted with the authority of the church to grant asylum (*In Eutropium; De capto Eutropio* [referring not to Eutropius but to Count John; see Cameron 1988]). All the information with which the historians supply us suggests that in her relationship with Chrysostom Eudoxia vacillated between reverence, even superstitious awe for his position and person as bishop, and exploitation of his position, as the following episode indicates. In order to settle the clash between John and his locum Severian of Gabala, who had seemingly usurped the bishop's position during his absence in Asia during 402, Eudoxia sought John out in the church of the Holy Apostles (Socrates, *H. E.* 6.11; Sozomen, *H. E.* 8.10), put her baby son on his lap, and insisted that he swear on the baby's head that he would be reconciled with Severian. Much to his annoyance, John was obliged to accede. Such annoyance at her interventions in delicate matters seems, however, to have been balanced on John's part by respect and gratitude for Eudoxia's support of Nicene Christianity, as evidenced by his eulogistic homily on the occasion of her participation in the nocturnal procession of martyrs' remains to a martyrion some miles outside the city (*Nov. Hom.* 2; CPG 444.1.1). We know that the nocturnal processions introduced by the bishop to counter those of the Arian party received support from the empress in the form of large silver crosses and the participation of her chamberlain Brison (Socrates, *H. E.* 6.8; Sozomen, *H. E.* 8.8). That the empress was ultimately the more powerful partner in the imperial marriage appears to have been recognized not only by John, but also by most clergy and ascetics who arrived in Constantinople seeking imperial favours, the monks of Nitria and bishop Porphyrius of Gaza being cases in point. While it is true that Eudoxia provided hospitality for those hostile to John's interests, notably Theophilus of Alexandria and Epiphanius of Salamis, it must also be acknowledged that Olympias herself cheerfully and impartially provided hospitality for Theophilus and others (Mayer 1999: 276).

In his dealings with the palace at Constantinople, then, the sources reveal John almost exclusively in relation to the empress, Eudoxia. There exists only the occa-



Figure 45.3 Solidus of Theodosius I (a) and solidus of Eudoxia (b). Photo by permission of Byzantine Collection, Dunbarton Oaks, Washington, DC.

sional hint of his relationship with the emperor Arcadius. Likewise he is only rarely to be observed in contact with their children. That he had relatively frequent contact with the imperial couple and family, their intimates and with palace officials, however, is almost certain. For instance, the widow Silvina, one of the four intimates John farewells on his departure for exile, is essentially a resident of the palace, as is John's 'enemy' Marsa (Mayer 1999: 271–5). The subtle indications of a more complex set of interactions with the palace and its individuals suggest that this aspect of John's life would benefit from a more nuanced reading (see Liebeschuetz 1984, 1985).

Congregations and laity

As far as his relationships with his congregations and with the laity in them is concerned, Chrysostom had the ability to inspire either great loyalty or great disaffection. Both of these reactions we find on the occasion at Constantinople when John had a visiting bishop from Galatia preach in his stead, a courtesy to which his congregation reacted very negatively because they had wanted John to preach and had expected John (*In illud: Pater meus usque modo operatur*; CPG 4441.10). At

Constantinople the laity, in particular women, grew hostile towards him, and attended synaxis elsewhere presided over, it seems, by another bishop, who trod a fine line with respect to John's authority (*In Eph. hom.* 11; Mayer 1996: 345–50). It is difficult, however, to determine the extent to which Chrysostom and other bishops in Late antiquity had direct contact with people outside of their relationship with them as preachers, because we do not yet know how much pastoral work they did in person. It is *prima facie* possible that a great deal of it was delegated (Rentinck 1970: 180–3). None the less, John seems to have had direct and private contact with wealthy elite women at Constantinople, even if these women did not belong to the class of deacons who came under his responsibility with regard to the clergy (Synod of the Oak, Charge 15 [SC 342.104.36–7]; Mayer 1999: 273–4). Whether he had the same intimate contact with laymen of this status is uncertain and perhaps unlikely.

At Antioch, whether by virtue of his private contact with the laity, or simply as a result of the relationship which he forged with them as an entertaining preacher, Palladius suggests that John was kidnapped in 397 in order to avoid a riot, or at least civil unrest (*Dial.* 5; SC 341.112–14). In other words, Chrysostom enjoyed a high degree of popularity amongst a sufficiently large sector of the Antiochene community for the authorities to fear the consequences of their displeasure. In Antioch too we have a suggestion of John's relationship with individual congregations in *In illud: In faciem ei restiti*, where it is clear that at that point he was assigned to the congregation at the Old church (Palaia), and had the opportunity to build up a particular rapport with the group of Christians who regularly worshipped there. At both cities, since a much larger number of Christians or nominal Christians tended to attend worship only at times of major festivals (particularly when they involved spectacular processions), his relationship with such irregular attendees is likely to have been less close. This hypothesis is borne out by *In Eph. hom.* 11, where he talks of different strata of attendees (PG 62.88.17–23); John himself points out that the majority of those who are presently disaffected with him came from those who used to attend regularly, which suggests that they had previously been particularly attached to him. John's effect on his audiences varied markedly, however, since in *De proph. obsc. hom.* 2 he refers to members of the audience pushing and shoving to get close to the ambo from which he was preaching (PG 56.176.22–31), while in *In Heb. hom.* 15 it is clear that people are chatting and making amusing comments to each other or else openly laughing while he is preaching his sermon (Mayer 1997: 113–14; 1998a: 132–3).

With regard, then, to the laity and the members of the various congregations which he served in each city, John seems to have inspired a complex range of emotions. The level of attachment to his preaching and degree of loyalty to his person appears to have varied. So too did the level of interaction differ from individual to individual within each congregation. While recent research has enabled us to some degree to recover what occurred between John and his audiences within worship, his contact with individuals and families in the street, business or home has yet to be investigated.



Figure 45.4 Eleventh-century mosaic depicting John Chrysostom, lower apse, Cathedral of Sancta Sophia, Kiev. Photo by permission of Yuri Koszaryez.

The clergy

Also, in John's relationships with clergy, whether of the same status as himself, of a more elevated status or subordinate, we observe a variety of interactions. In Antioch his relations with his bishop, Flavian, and with Meletius, Flavian's successor, have traditionally been thought to have been close (see e.g. Kelly 1995: 57, 103), to the point where Flavian deputized John to take over many of his duties during the latter part of John's presbyterate. There is no clear evidence for this, however, beyond John's obvious popularity as a preacher and the suggestion in *In illud: In faciem ei restiti* that Flavian on at least one occasion took John away from his regular duties to accompany him on some official occasion. The fact that John preached as one of a number of presbyters or in conjunction with Flavian on festival occasions (e.g., *De b.*

Philogonio, De s. Babyla, In diem natalem) merely reflects routine procedure during this time. Again, John's warm encomia on Flavian and Meletius in *Cum presbyter ordinatus fuit, In Meletium* and *De statuis hom.* 3 and 21 could owe as much to rhetoric as to a genuinely close and warm relationship between John and these bishops. His relations with other clergy, male and female, in Antioch have yet to be explored properly and documented. None the less, we know that he had more or less annual contact with a group of rural Syriac-speaking monk-priests who came in from the surrounding countryside to consult with Flavian and appeared in John's own congregation on occasion (*De statuis hom.* 19, *Catechesis* 8; van de Pavard 1991: 260–89), and, as we have seen, there is also evidence in his letters of his continuing contact with various clergy from Antioch after his transfer to Constantinople.

We are much better informed about John's relations with the clergy in the imperial capital, although these are not usually highlighted in the biographies. Regarding the clergy John inherited at Constantinople, Palladius (*Dial.* 5, SC 341.118–24) makes it clear that on his arrival the new bishop conducted a major review of their activities and lifestyles, alienating many of them in the process because of his stricter views (Liebeschuetz 1984: 88–90). On the other hand, John was not averse to ordaining and promoting his own candidates to positions. This was demonstrated most notably by his interference in church affairs in Ephesus which resulted in the consecration of Heracleides as bishop there (Liebeschuetz 1984: 94–5), and by the promotion of Serapion the deacon to the post of supervisor of the church administration in Constantinople, despite Serapion's poor human resource management skills, which are discussed at length by both Baur (1959–60: II, 97, 158–9) and Kelly (1995: 121, 182–4). Chrysostom's relations with visiting clergy were not always smooth, as is evidenced by the visit of Theophilus of Alexandria and Epiphanius of Salamis, who eventually snubbed him (Palladius, *Dial.* 8, SC 341.158–62; Socrates, *H. E.* 6.14; Sozomen, *H. E.* 8.14). Despite John's initially pleasant contact with Severian of Gabala, empress Eudoxia, as we have seen, had to intervene in order to reconcile the two, and the homilies *De pace* imply an interim public reconciliation. On the other hand, if we may believe that around forty bishops were with Chrysostom at the time of his exile (Palladius, *Dial.* 8; SC 341.164), it seems that a large number of visiting bishops supported his authority and activities. Palladius' partisan account of John's life and trials is witness to the strength of attachment to John on the part of at least one fellow bishop. John's authority over and pastoral care of his clergy in Constantinople are revealed by his letters to the presbyters Theophilus and Sallustius (*Epp.* 212, 203), in which he dwells on their failure to continue their duties bravely immediately after his exile. An important part of John's interaction and relations with the clergy involves the female deacons, especially in Constantinople. His private farewell to Olympias, Pentadia, Procla and Silvina (if the latter was in fact ordained) suggests that he worked with these deacons directly, not through male deacons or presbyters, and that the Johnites in Constantinople considered them to be particularly close to the bishop. In the case of Olympias' female relatives, as we have seen, John not only ordains them but possibly also instructs them, and he continues to supervise their activities within Olympias' monastery.

As is evident from this brief discussion of John's relations with other clergy the

evidence for his experiences at Antioch both during and prior to his presbyterate are poor in comparison to the amount of information available for Constantinople and the period of his exile. A view of his relations with women deacons and other church workers during this earlier period is noticeably absent. Yet if, as Kelly posits, in the latter years of his presbyterate at Antioch John took on *de facto* oversight of the Nicene church in that city, one must then ask whether he acted in the same authoritarian and unrelenting manner towards the clergy of that city as he is supposed to have done at Constantinople. Likewise, did he work equally closely with female deacons? Whatever the answers to these questions, it is clear that the nature of his interactions with fellow clergy is again more complex than is usually supposed and that the current view presents only a small part of the possible picture.

Ascetics

John's six-year experimentation with the ascetic life during his twenties in Antioch gave him first-hand experience of various ascetic lifestyles and their devotees (Brown 1988: 305–22; Mayer 1998b). He trained with several companions in the urban *asketerion* of Diodore and Carterius, and spent four years in the mountains behind Antioch with an elderly Syrian ascetic mentor prior to living supposedly for two years on his own in a cave (Palladius, *Dial.* 5; SC 341.108–10). Bishop Flavian of Antioch, to whom John was responsible as presbyter, was himself an ascetic. Whether on his return to Antioch John continued to visit the ascetics with whom he had spent time in the mountains is difficult to determine: he instructs his congregation to visit them (e.g., *In Matt. hom.* 69/70, 72/3; *In I Tim. hom.* 14), but there is no evidence that he himself did. However, the presence of the monks in the city on the day of the trial of the decurions after the riots (*De statuis hom.* 17) may have meant that he had a brief contact with men whom he had encountered during those earlier years. Of the various female ascetical establishments in Antioch John may have known from his childhood the group of *parthenoi* who lived under the supervision of the female deacon Publia (Theodoret, *H. E.* 3.14). In Constantinople it is possible that he had frequent contact with ascetics, not just through the bishops and monks who visited the city, but also since he appointed various ascetic persons to staff the hospital which he established out of church funds (Palladius, *Dial.* 5; SC 341.122). He certainly had a heated dispute with the large numbers of monks he found in the capital, who were led by the influential Syrian, Isaac, and over whose loose organization the local bishop had little control (Sozomen, *H. E.* 8.9; Dagron 1970; Liebeschuetz 1984: 90–3; Mayer 1998b). John's clash with Isaac seems also to have been personal (Palladius, *Dial.* 6; SC 341.126–8), and the monk adduced charges against him at his trial (Kelly 1995: 123–5). John's close contact with Olympias and her convent in Constantinople is, as we have seen, well attested. In terms of women who had chosen not to enter into a second marriage, his own mother was such a person and probably led a celibate life (*ad viduam iuniorem* 2; SC 138.120) his aunt Sabina seems to have been a celibate as well as a deacon, and at Constantinople the women closest to him were all widows who had renounced a second marriage and who were either deacons or were involved in charitable activities as lay individuals (Mayer 1999: 269–74).

As a result of his own ascetic leanings and as a consequence of the state of the ascetic movement in Eastern cities in the latter part of the fourth century, John is found in close association with a number of ascetic individuals and communities throughout the course of his adult life. It is possible that the degree to which he associated with men and women attracted to the ascetic life owed something, too, to his family's position in Antiochene society and to the circles in which he moved as a cleric at both Antioch and Constantinople. Unlike many of the other spheres of interaction examined in this chapter, the ascetic arena is one of the few for which the sources are broadly distributed.

Administrative officials

Both in Antioch and in Constantinople Chrysostom had ample opportunity to observe the work of administrative officials and to become acquainted with them personally. In Antioch, for example, the *consularis Syriae* came into the church to calm the people in the period of intense fear after the riots (*De statu hom.* 16; see van de Pavert 1991: 55), while it is possible that an official of similar status, who is simply termed 'the archon', led the procession occasionally in Antioch on the feast-day of certain martyrs (*Hom. in martyres*). When John was carried off from Antioch with the intention of conveying him to Constantinople for consecration as bishop of that city, it was a *comes* who was entrusted with the task of summoning him and informing him of his candidature (Palladius, *Dial.* 5; SC 341.112–14). Officials who were Christians, such as the *magister militum per Orientem* Ellebichus, may also have been encountered by him when he assisted in distributing the Eucharist. In Constantinople contact with high-level officials also occurred outside of the domain of worship. John alludes to the long-standing hostility between himself and the powerful eunuch and chief chamberlain Eutropius (*In Eutropium*): the consul has constantly waged war against the church, most notably in his laws restricting the right of asylum and restricting the right of the church to provide sanctuary, while John for his part has apparently had frequent clashes with Eutropius in which he has criticized his behaviour and materialistic motives. Later, at imperial behest, John was involved in negotiations with the Gothic general, Gainas, who had demanded of the emperor that his three chief political enemies, the ex-consul Aurelianus, the general Saturninus and Eudoxia's favourite, Count John, be handed over to him as hostages. Count John, who managed to escape being handed over to Gainas, none the less conceived a great dislike for Chrysostom because of John's failure to support him adequately, while Saturninus' widow, Castricia, was left with an enduring dislike of the bishop as well (Liebeschuetz 1984: 97–8). Close contact must have developed between John and Eudoxia's chamberlain, Brison, who trained the church choir and assisted with the nocturnal processions which John instituted to combat the influence of the Arians in the capital. John also encountered Brison when he was recalled from his first exile, in that the chamberlain was the official entrusted with the letter of recall (Socrates, *H. E.* 6.16, Sozomen, *H. E.* 8.18), and the bishop continued to write to him from exile, which suggests an ongoing relationship (*Epp.* 190, 234). While travelling into exile a second time Chrysostom met various officials from other cities, perhaps at Caesarea (Delmaire 1997: 306), and most obviously con-

sorted constantly with the military escort (*praefectiani*) who accompanied him and prevented him from too close contact with various persons along the way. John writes to several officials from his place of exile (Delmaire 1997: 306–8): to Gemellus (*Epp.* 79, 132, 124, 194), who was elevated to a prefecture in 405 (Delmaire 1991: 128–9); to Paeanius (*Epp.* 95, 193, 204, 220), who seems to have been a close supporter and is clearly promoted to a relatively high position shortly after John's exile (Delmaire 1991: 148–51); and to a certain Studius (*Epp.* 197), who is *eparch tes poleos*, on the subject of the death of his brother. The latter correspondence, however, does not necessarily indicate a relationship; it may be simply that John thinks it expedient to send his condolences.

Because of the close connection between church, city and state in the second half of the fourth century it is not surprising to find John consorting with various high-ranking administrative officials, especially when he was bishop of Constantinople, the imperial capital. While the evidence for Antioch is more limited it is reasonable to suppose that there too he had some degree of interaction with provincial and city officials outside of the domain of worship.

Relations with non-Christians

We come now to how John Chrysostom conducted himself with people of other faiths. The prominence of Jews in Antiochene society in Late antiquity is well known (Wilken 1983), and, while there is little evidence to support the assumption, they doubtless played a part in the society of Constantinople too. As a consequence, the anti-Jewish rhetoric which we find in John's writings, particularly in his homilies, is to be taken largely as reflecting some of the ecclesiastical agendas of the time, rather than as evidence of John's own attitude. While his general comments with regard to Jews can be polemical in the classical manner, when he is speaking in specific rather than general terms his comments can be admiring or even warm. For example, he claims that the local Jews in Antioch put Christians to shame by their assiduous observance of the Sabbath, in that they stop all business dealings immediately as soon as they see the sun setting on Friday (*In illud: Si esurierit inimicus*; PG 51.176.31–45). Again, in contradistinction to Christians, the local Jews obey their priests and do not complain about desisting from all physical labour for a designated number of days (*In princ. Actorum hom.* 1; PG 51.70.1–11).

The fact that John spent seven discourses in Antioch preaching against the tendency of some of his parishioners to Judaize suggests that he was well aware of the seductiveness of the alleged healing properties of the cave of Matrona at Daphne outside Antioch (Vinson 1994: 180–6), and of the attraction for the general population of the dancing and public festivities at Jewish festivals (Wilken 1983: 93). In Antioch the Jewish sector clearly had a long history within the city, and John's disgust at the preference exhibited by Christians for sealing business deals in the local synagogue (*Adv. Iud. hom.* 1; PG 48. 847–8) shows how central it was to his task as preacher to teach his audience to distinguish between proper Christian practices and certain Judaizing habits which were of long standing and held priority. *In illud: Vidi dom. hom.* 3 (SC 277.110.74–7), where the more overt devotional practices of certain Jews

are described, indicates that the public behaviour of Jews was a familiar part of the Antiochene community.

In terms of pagan communities and Chrysostom's relationship with them, we again have better information for Antioch. Like the rhythms of Jewish life and worship which were an integral part of life in that city, pagan rituals and events had an equally integral role, regardless of the religious affiliations of the inhabitants (Wilken 1983: 16–26; MacMullen 1997). Thus we learn from *In II Tim. hom.* 8 that Chrysostom's parishioners prefer to consult pagan priests when they have lost a valuable animal (PG 62.649–50), and from *In Col. hom.* 8 it appears that women in Antioch automatically resort to amulets for the cure of sick children, and consult old women in the hope of a cure (PG 62. 357–8). In *De statuis hom.* 19 we are told that women and small children tend to wear pieces of the Gospel text hanging from their necks for apotropaic purposes (PG 49.196 37–40). Pagan superstition in general played a large role in the life of John's parishioners in Antioch (*Cat. ad illuminandos* 2; cf. *In Eph. hom.* 12 [provenance uncertain]): the rhythms of the city, its calendar, theatrical performances and horse races were intimately linked to long-standing celebrations, including the local Olympic games. In *In S. Iulianum* he expresses his concerns about the established custom among the Antiochene citizenry of retiring to Daphne on the following day for some kind of meal or picnic, which was accompanied by male choruses and other lewd festivities (PG 50.672–4). In *In kalendas*, too, he indicates some of the alcoholic celebrations with which the church had to compete at that time of year. With the exception of the latter, the influence of pagan activities undoubtedly obtained to a large degree in Constantinople as well, but there the impact of the imperial cult, despite the overt Christianization of the imperial family, would have been more in evidence. In the capital both the hippodrome and festivities associated with the imperial cult physically disturbed church services, either through the noise or through the competition for attendance (*Contra ludos et theatra*; PG 56.263), and the church historians Sozomen and Socrates describe the celebrations associated with the new statue erected in honour of the empress Eudoxia, which was apparently the last straw for John (Sozomen, *HE* 8.20 and Socrates, *HE* 6.18). As was the case with Judaism, here too it must have been John's constant concern to instruct his parishioners to differentiate Christian civic obligations from pagan or paganising activities. Not to be forgotten in the context of the paganism of his day are John's personal dealings with pagan or paganizing officials, such as the *consularis Syriae* in Antioch, Celsus, who presented himself at the church to calm the populace after the riots concerned with the imperial statues, and with urban prefects and other prominent figures at Constantinople who were obliged to preside over the civic and imperial cults regardless of their personal conviction (Dagron 1974: 292). At Antioch, too, it is important to remember that John received his more advanced education from the pagan rhetorician Libanius as well as from the ascetic Christians Diodore and Carterius.

For once, with respect to John's encounters with individuals and communities of other faiths, the bias of the evidence permits a clearer reconstruction of what occurred at Antioch. At Constantinople the picture is much obscured in the sources by the imperial presence and interest in John's own uneasy relationships with various groups in the capital, his trial and exile. While Antioch emerges clearly as a city

with complex religious dynamics – that is, a city in which Christianity was still much in competition with other cults – it should not be assumed that conversely at Constantinople Christianity was dominant. Quite apart from the inherently pagan character of the civic calendar and imperial cult, private non-Christian beliefs and practices were tenacious (MacMullen 1997) and it is likely that John was obliged to preach and counsel against their persistence in the daily lives of his parishioners there also. In addition, too little is known about the presence of Jews at Constantinople during this period to ignore the possibility of their influence.

Relations with heterodox and schismatic Christians

Not to be neglected in any study of John Chrysostom is his interaction with heterodox Christians and schismatics. After all, as a young man he grew up in Antioch in a church that was divided between at least three factions within Christianity, including the Arian Christians and two schismatic Nicene factions (Wilken 1983: 10–16; Kelly 1995: 10–13). For a brief period around 375 the city also boasted a fourth bishop, an Apollinarian. John himself was appointed lector in one of the two schismatic factions, the one that was led by Bishop Meletius, neither of which was in particular favour at the time (Kelly 1995: 16–17). John's experience among that group of Christians involved services in the open air on the *campus martius* across the river from the city, because that faction had been banned from the city itself and its churches placed in the hands of the Arians by the emperor Valens. It is likely that the *asketerion* run by Diodore and Carterius, both adherents of the Meletian faction, was situated across the river in the same vicinity (*Laus Diodori*; PG 52.764.26–8). It was only when John was ordained deacon that his Christian church became prominent in Antioch. The schism between his group of Nicene Christians and the other persisted, however, during the entire length of his presbyterate there, and it was only after his elevation to the see of Constantinople that the issue was resolved (Kelly 1995: 116–18). Consequently, when John speaks of the Christians in Antioch he is always talking about a confused and divided community, just as when he talks of processions with the whole city in attendance on days of martyrial festivals his comments must be viewed with a degree of scepticism. The techniques which he learnt during those years in Antioch for promoting the Christian faction to which he was attached, techniques which would have included careful phrasing of doxologies and the conduct of nocturnal processions and of litanies, would have prepared him for the situation which he found on his arrival in Constantinople. There the Arians, who had dominated the city until the accession of Theodosius, still exerted a degree of influence over the populace, and various ascetic or monastic communities living within and immediately outside the city had Arian leanings (Dagron 1970, and 1974: 419–53; Miller 1985: 74–85). In a series of sermons attacking the Anomoeans, the most radical of the Arian parties, he himself suggests that the Nicene Christians of Constantinople are in the minority (*Contra Anomoeos homiliae* 11). The presence of the Novatians within the city, with their own churches and imperial protection, is likely to have struck him as contributing to a situation which bore marked parallels with that with which he had been familiar in Antioch (Kelly 1995: 125–7).

Relationships with members of various social strata

Lower status groups?

When we consider John's relationships with the various social strata in Antioch and Constantinople, it is interesting to speculate in the first instance whether the monks and ascetics with whom he associated as a young man in his ascetic phase came from markedly different social backgrounds from those with which he was used to associating, or whether they were of a similar social standing. For instance, the elderly Syrian who was John's ascetic mentor ought, according to Brown's theory (Brown 1971), to have come from a poor, uneducated background; but this is by no means certain. It is, in fact, questionable when we consider that in Antioch Bishop Flavian, himself clearly from the upper class (*Sermo cum presbyter* [PG 48.696.46–9]; *In Gen. sermo* 1 [PG 54.585.47–67]), was an ascetic, and that the young men with whom John lived when experimenting with urban asceticism in the *asketerion* of Diodore and Carterius were all from the same comfortable social background as John (Kelly 1995: 18–23). On the other hand, the Syriac-speaking rural monk-presbyters whom John encounters every year or so are less educated and probably of a much lower social status (van de Paeverd 1991: 281). In Antioch, the site for which we have more information on social strata during John's preaching career, it is likely that at least one of the congregations with which he was involved contained middle-class persons, including artisans, and possibly also soldiers (*De baptismo Christi* [PG 49.365.5–14]; *De paen. hom.* 3 [PG 49.291.31–5 *a.i.*]). In general, however, the bulk of the evidence points to audiences comprised of the wealthy to the very wealthy, in particular the aristocratic elite (MacMullen 1989; Leyerle 1997; Mayer 1998a).

Upper status groups

In Constantinople, John seems to have moved to a large extent in the circles of the rich and influential; that is, the senatorial and curial classes (Liebeschuetz 1984; Mayer 1999). Here he had some negative experiences, for instance with the three widows whom Palladius describes as being particularly hostile to John and who also had intimate connection with the palace: Marsa, the widow of Promotus, who had been a distinguished military commander and consul; Castricia, the widow of the ex-consul Saturninus; and Eugraphia, who provided hospitality to Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria, when he should have accepted the hospitality of John (*Dial.* 4; SC 341.94.89–94; and *Dial.* 8; SC 341.162.76–9). As foster-mother of Eudoxia Marsa had influence on, and an especially close connection with, the empress. On his travels in exile, it is the wealthy who offer hospitality in particular and assist him in whatever way possible. For example, Seleucia, the wife of Rufinus in Caesarea, offers him her suburban estate and gives instructions for her manager to gather farmers from her various estates to defend John, if the monks should threaten him there (*Epp.* 9 [14]). It is the senatorial class who engage in pastoral work and generally support the charitable activities of the church. Sozomen (*H. E.* 8.23) tells of the elderly noblewoman, Nicarete, from Bithynia, who, despite confiscation of a large portion of her patrimony, still cares for the sick and poor in Constantinople

during John's episcopate, and resists John's attempts to ordain her as a deacon or as a catechist of female ascetics. John's networks extended beyond the Eastern capital to Rome and elsewhere, as evidenced by Letters 168–9, written to Proba and Juliana in Rome asking for their patronage of certain of his clergy, and Letter 170 to the Roman matron Italica, in which he persuades her to use her connections on his behalf.

It is difficult to say whether John ever had any direct interaction with lower social classes. Certainly he passed beggars and the homeless in the streets of Antioch (*De eleemosyne*) and encountered them outside the churches and martyria there (*De paen. hom.* 3; PG 49.294); it is also possible that he was accosted by beggars in the agoras of Constantinople (*In Acta apost. hom.* 3; PG 60.39.27–8). While, according to Palladius (*Dial.* 5; SC 341.122), John organized the hospitals in Constantinople, including one specializing in the care of lepers (Ps. Martyrius; see Kelly 1995: 119–20), there is no evidence that he visited these institutions or involved himself in the day-to-day care of the inmates. Again, it is valid to wonder what he means when, as in *In princ. Actorum hom.* 1 (PG 51.69.51–61), he says that the poor are absent from the church on that occasion because they have to earn their living. Is this perhaps a similar social group to the one he refers to in *De mutatione nom. hom.* 3 (PG 51.136.21–7), where he says that married males who spend their lives in daily toil or are caught up in business affairs can only manage to attend the liturgy once a week? From John's other homilies it is patent that the poverty which he discusses on many occasions is relative, possibly because the truly poor may not have taken part in the synaxis, but waited outside the church to beg (Cunningham and Allen 1998: intro.; Mayer 1998a).

As we have seen, it is at present difficult to determine the identity of the social classes with which John had direct interaction throughout the course of his life and ecclesiastical career, apart from the aristocracy and the wealthy. While he himself was probably a member of the curial class at Antioch and associated with citizens of the same or higher status during his youth, the real question lies with the degree to which he interacted with persons outside of his own class as a result of his pastoral and preaching duties. At Constantinople the bulk of the evidence points likewise towards senatorial women and other members of the elite. Careful investigation of the sources, particularly John's sermons, is required before it can be determined with any confidence whether members of the lower classes and the very poor attended the different churches at which he preached, or came under his personal care in their homes or in the church-run welfare institutions.

Different ethnic and language groups

While the city of Constantinople must have struck John in many ways as similar to Antioch in that both were large, wealthy, influential and Hellenized cities, there was not only similarity but also difference in the two locations with regard to the different language groups and ethnic communities with which he came into contact. In Antioch he regularly encountered Syriac-speaking laypeople and ascetics on the occasion of martyrial festivals which drew such people to the city from the surrounding countryside, particularly when a market-day was associated with it (*De b.*

Philogonio [PG 48.749–50]; *De ss martyribus* [PG 50.705–7]). In the case of Syriac-speaking ascetics who also operated as priests, such occasions apparently also provided an opportunity for consultation with their bishop. Since such persons appear not to have spoken Greek, and it is probable that Flavian, who grew up in Antioch as a member of the wealthy upper classes, did not speak Syriac, the episcopal entourage must have incorporated bilingual interpreters. The same may also have been the case on the occasions when such persons attended worship (*Cat.* 8; *De statuis hom.* 19), although it may be that worship continued in Greek as usual and the Syriac-speaking visitors were expected to cope as best they were able. The regular influxes of beggars and the rural poor into Antioch at times of famine would also have exposed John and his fellow citizens to non-Greek speakers (Libanius, *Oration* 1.205–11; Downey 1961: 383–4, 419–20). The extent to which Syriac speakers lived within the city of Antioch and comprised a normal sector of the community is unknown. By contrast, at Constantinople there was a relatively large Gothic-speaking community because of the strong representation of ethnic Goths in the armed forces. The Nicene members of this community had their own church, in which John preached in Greek on at least one occasion (*Cum presbyter Gotbus*; CPG 4441.9). While he preached in Greek, the lessons were read in Gothic, and a homily was also preached by a presbyter in Gothic. The extent to which the liturgy itself was conducted in Gothic is unknown. John also encountered a range of languages simply because Constantinople was the capital of the eastern empire and the residence of the imperial couple, a factor which drew people from all over the East who were seeking patronage and influence. Severian of Gabala was a native speaker of Syriac who arrived during John's tenure and to whom John entrusted the task of preaching while he himself was absent on a trip to Ephesus (Socrates, *H. E.* 6.11; Sozomen, *H. E.* 8.10). Acacius of Berrhoea, a semi-permanent resident of Constantinople at this period, was likewise a Syrian native, although presumably both he and Severian were capable of conversing in Greek. By the same token John Cassian, whom John ordained to the priesthood while he resided in Constantinople (Palladius, *Dial.* 3.83–4), came from the West and presumably spoke Latin by preference, as did the aristocratic widow Silvina, with whom John was closely associated. On the occasion of the translation of martyrial remains to a martyrion outside Constantinople, John states explicitly that during the nocturnal procession the Psalm was sung in Greek, Latin, Syriac and Gothic (*Nov. hom.* 2 [CPG 4441.1]; PG 63.472.10–13). The capital was evidently a more diverse community ethnically and linguistically than the city of his childhood and youth.

Relations with visitors

Firmly fixed as John Chrysostom was in the context of his communities, there were numerous occasions when he was called upon to interact with people who were not a permanent part of the communities in Antioch or Constantinople. Here we have to think of visitors, itinerants, country people, and clergy from elsewhere in the same district as well as from other districts. In Antioch John had, for example, periodic contact with the rural Syrian monk-priests when they came to town for consultation with their bishop, Flavian (van de Pavard 1991: 290). Then again, Antioch was a

major see in Syria and the East, and synods of varying dimensions were frequently held there (see e.g., *De incompr. dei nat. hom.* 2; SC 28bis.142.20–5), a fact which would explain why occasionally a number of bishops were in attendance on Flavian when John was preaching (*In Gen. sermo* 8; PG 54.616.7–13 *a.i.*). Because of seasonal factors Antioch was also particularly susceptible to the influx of homeless and beggars, who were greeted with deep suspicion by the permanent residents (*De elemosyna*). These same people are probably some of the homeless whom John has passed in the street on his way to the church. In Constantinople the semi-permanent presence of a number of bishops during John's episcopate is striking. Often these men were in residence for reasons of personal advantage, as the cases of Acacius of Beroea, Severian of Gabala and Antioch of Ptolemais illustrate. Others, like Theophilus of Alexandria, were summoned to the capital for reasons of ecclesiastical politics, while Epiphanius of Salamis travelled there to teach John a lesson with regard to the condemnation of Origenism: in his misplaced zeal he attempted to ordain on John's territory, held a synaxis without permission, and had the intention of denouncing the local bishop during synaxis in the church of the Holy Apostles (Socrates, *H. E.* 6.12–14; Sozomen, *H. E.* 8.14). On one occasion we hear of a bishop from Galatia who, on account of his status, was given licence by John to preach in his stead (*In illud: Pater meus usque modo operatur*; CPG 4441.10), and in his letter to Pope Innocent John tells us that on the night of Easter Saturday, 404, there were more than forty bishops with him for the baptism of the female catechisands (SC 342.86.166–9). Monks too came to Constantinople, such as those from Nitria who sought arbitration between themselves and Theophilus of Alexandria. John, however, avoided this issue, rather than making a stand, but organized various noble women to feed the monks and help them support themselves. Ultimately the men bypassed the bishop's authority and went directly to empress Eudoxia for help (Sozomen, *H. E.* 8.13; Palladius, *Dial.* 7–8).

By virtue of their status both cities thus attracted a diverse range of visitors which constantly swelled and diminished the population of each city in accord with seasonal and periodic factors. As we have seen, various of these groups and individuals would attend church and were encountered by John also in an official capacity. The existence and unpredictability of this factor adds considerably to the complexity of John's relationships.

Women

At the beginning of this study we pointed out that Chrysostom has been charged with misogyny. While far too little comprehensive research has been done on this question, the subject itself is currently gaining momentum, and for the sake of the completeness of our short treatment of John, based as it is on his relationships within his society, it is important to discuss briefly his relationships with women. What has been done (Clark 1979; Ford 1989; Rousseau 1995; Mayer 1999) suggests that, although in his rhetoric John did inveigh heavily against women and their foibles, in his actual relations with them he was one of the more liberal of the Church Fathers and one of the most appreciative of their value to the promotion of the Nicene Christian church and its ministries. It should also be borne in mind that

John inveighed in an equally heated way against the rich (*De eleemosyna*; *In Heb. hom. 11 et al.*), against teenage males (*In Matt. hom. 49/50*), and against adult men (*In Matt. hom. 7*; *In I Thess. hom. 5 et al.*). That is, when his invective is viewed across the entire body of his homilies and writings, it can be seen that he directed his strictures against all who behaved offensively, without bias towards gender, economic or social status, or age group. Furthermore, as in the cases of Julia, Italica and Proba at Rome, the sisters of bishop Pergamius at Nicaea (*Epp. 4* [12]) and others, he seems to have appreciated that wealthy, aristocratic women, especially widows, were in a unique position in Late Antique society, which made their contacts as valuable to an ecclesiastic of the curial class as those of rich, aristocratic men, and to have had no qualms about encouraging such women to use their networks and resources in support of his own ecclesiastical agenda. In at least a few instances, involving Olympias, Pentadia, Carteria, Adolia and perhaps others of his female correspondents, he appears to have enjoyed a particularly friendly and close relationship with women from this elevated level of Antiochene and Constantinopolitan society (Liebeschuetz 1984; Mayer 1999). A careful, systematic study of both his rhetoric and his factual relations with both men and women is likely to produce a more complete and balanced picture than has hitherto been accepted.

CONCLUSION

What we begin to observe when we view the person of John from these different perspectives is an array of interconnecting pieces which together reinforce the picture of a complex man in a complex society. For instance, the blurred boundaries between church and city and state at this time, in conjunction with his own background, see him interacting throughout his life with a range of administrative officials both within the ecclesiastical sphere and outside of it. We begin to observe, too, in a number of areas – for instance, that of other faiths, other Christian factions and his relations with women – a discrepancy between his rhetoric and reality. When the bias of the sources towards his episcopacy – the years at Constantinople and subsequently in exile – are taken into consideration it becomes evident that in fleshing out a profile of the man we need to exercise a great deal of caution. In particular, much careful work has yet to be done before a reliable psychological study of John can be arrived at.

Even so, there are some tentative conclusions which can be drawn at this preliminary stage of the investigation. When John Chrysostom is studied from the perspective of his personal relationships and interactions, the culture and society in which he lived, and the circles in which he moved, there emerges a man who spent a great deal of his time in association with the urban class above that into which he was born. This is seen most clearly at the time of his exile, both because of the extraordinary circumstances which it created and because this is the only period of his life from which there survives communication between John and individuals on a personal level. These letters proclaim his need to maintain his networks with both men and women in Antioch, Constantinople, Rome and along the route at a time when the favours which could be performed by his contacts were vital to him. The

complaints which permeate the later letters indicate, too, the strong feelings of frustration which he felt at being cut off in the long winter months from direct and frequent communication. John was very much a man of the large, wealthy, bustling, Hellenized city. His reactions to the circumstances of his exile serve to underline the intelligence with which the route and manner of his deportation were selected. Few other punishments could have been more painful to a man of his particular background, status and generation.

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JEROME



Dennis Brown

LIFE AND CONTEXT

St Jerome, in many quarters ‘the greatest doctor of the church’, is chiefly remembered as one of the most forceful personalities and one of the most important interpreters of the Bible in the early centuries of Christianity. Jerome was probably born sometime in the early 340s CE in the town of Stridon, in Dalmatia, modern Yugoslavia. He died in 420, renowned for his exegetical activity and for living a holy and ascetic life.

Jerome was born into a well-off Christian family. In one of his early letters, (*Epistle* 3.5), Jerome recalls running through the slave quarters of his home and being looked after by foster-nurses and a personal attendant. In Stridon, he attended the *ludus litterarius* or elementary school, the normal age for which was 6 to 11 or 12 years old. Jerome would have learned to read and write here, and have been instructed in simple arithmetic. He may also have picked up the rudiments of Greek. It must also have been at Stridon where Jerome began to train his astonishingly retentive memory, which was, in later life, to prove so very useful in his scholarship.

Jerome was sent to Rome for his secondary education, to one of the most famous teachers of the age – Aelius Donatus. The curriculum here would have included some mathematics, science and music, but was principally concerned with the rules of grammar, particularly the correct analysis and use of language, and classical literature. The favourite authors were Virgil, the poet and founder of liberal Latin culture; Terence, the comic playwright; Sallust the historian; and Cicero the stylist, orator and philosopher. Jerome obviously loved his time in Rome, for his works are full of quotations and allusions to classical literature.¹ When he was about 15 or 16, Jerome would have graduated to a Roman school of rhetoric, where he would have learned the art of public speaking, with a view, perhaps, to entering a career in advocacy or the civil service. Jerome’s later writings show how well he learned the art of rhetoric, for instance, its stylized procedures, its stock emotional phrases and its tendency to exaggeration (*Commentary on Galatians* 2.1). His education provided the foundation upon which he was to base all his work in the coming years.²

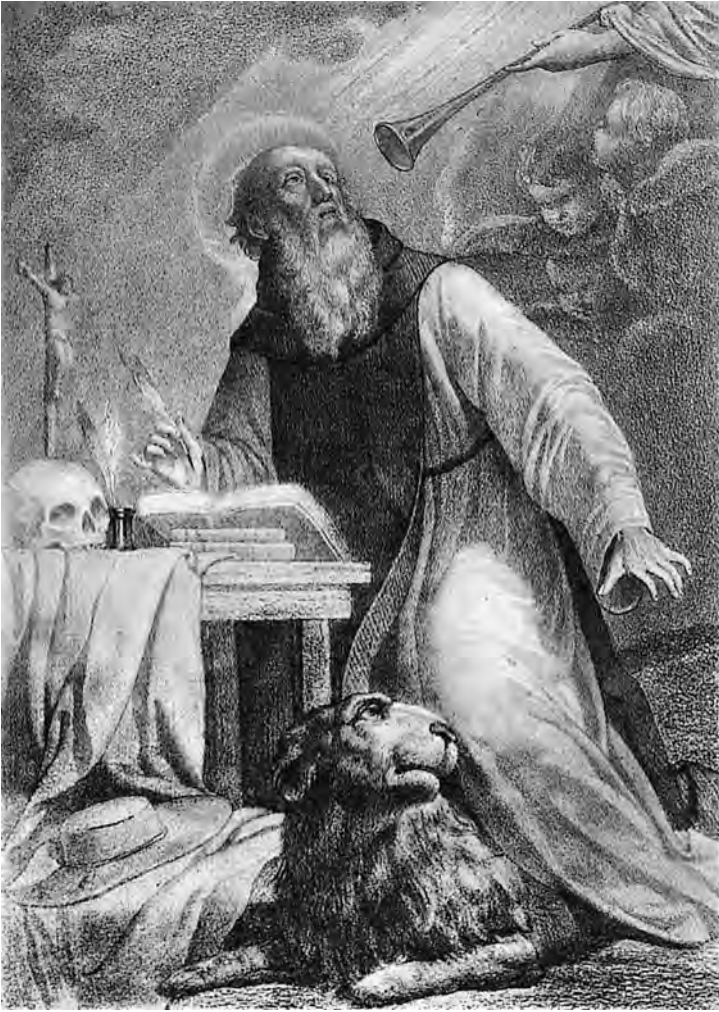


Figure 46.1 Jerome, the greatest doctor of the church. From Siguenza (1595), reproduced in the 1907 English translation.

Though education was perhaps the single most important aspect of Jerome's personality, it was not the only one. He was a fervent supporter of asceticism. After finishing his Roman education, Jerome travelled widely. He seems to have become interested in the ascetic life at Trier, which had become an important centre for monasticism. He soon decided to withdraw to the desert of Chalcis in northern Syria, to experience first-hand the spiritual life offered by a colony of hermits. His sojourn in the desert lasted only two or three years, but the desire to lead a holy and ascetic life stayed with him and became part of his life-long quest.

He moved to Aquileia in c.375 CE, but left there in 377 and travelled widely for the next five years. At this point he returned to Rome, taking up residence in the

city under the patronage of Pope Damasus. He served as secretary to Damasus from 382 to 385. During this time Jerome became widely known for his advocacy of monasticism, and he gathered a number of disciples, some of whom were noble women. He studied the Bible and asceticism with them, meeting in the house of Marcella on the Aventine. His association with this group of women met a deep-seated need in his personality. His correspondence with them reveals a great deal about his warm sympathies, his skill at adapting himself to their different interests, and his ability to gain a strong hold over several of them, and particularly the wealthy widow Paula and her daughter Eustochium.

After the death of Damasus in 385, Jerome's influence in Rome waned and he was forced to leave, but he was accompanied by Paula and Eustochium. The group visited many of the sacred sites in the Holy land and Egypt. The route taken by the group is recorded by Jerome in *Epistle* 108 and in his *Apology against Rufinus*.³ In these travels, Jerome learned much about the topography of the important sites in biblical history, and this information was to be very useful to him in his exegesis of both Testaments, particularly when he interpreted the literal sense of texts. He also wrote a trilogy of books, in part based on his travels and which informed and influenced his exegetical studies. These were the *Book of the Interpretations of Hebrew Names*, the *On Sites and Names of Hebrew Places*, and the *Hebrew Questions on the Book of Genesis*. These were largely etymological works, which had a long history, not only in Christianity but also in Judaism and paganism.

Jerome and the group of women finally settled at Bethlehem after their travels. Paula provided the finance to build two monasteries, one for men under the guidance of Jerome, and one for women, over which Paula presided. Jerome formulated rules of monastic living for both institutions, and he remained here for the rest of his long life. Jerome became a champion of the idea of virginity, not just for monks but for lay Christians also. He died there in 420 and his remains rest in St Catherine's church in the city (Figure 46.2).

JEROME AND ASCETICISM

Jerome's interest in asceticism deserves further attention. He probably first became interested in the ascetic life because of the unworthiness of the church in his native Dalmatia. As he writes in the *Life of Malchus*, an essay composed c. 390: 'The Church after it had arrived at [the existence of] Christian princes became greater in power by its wealth, but lesser in virtue' (*Life of Malchus* 1). His own bishop, whom Jerome describes as 'an ailing pilot of a sinking ship' disgusted him, as did his fellow townspeople, who were Christians who thought only of their stomachs (*Epistle* 7.5)! When he moved to Aquileia c. 375, Jerome was able to establish a community where secular ambitions were renounced and spiritual simplicities embraced. This allowed him the space to live a detached life of abstinence, and the contemplation of divine truths.

At this early stage, the practice of asceticism was still seen as an eccentricity by many Christians, but Jerome's zeal, his controversial personality and the theology of asceticism which he developed over the years, were to make this way of life into the



Figure 46.2; Jerome's tomb in St Catherine's church in Bethlehem. Photo Catherine Brown.

representative movement among Christians in the West. Jerome travelled east, to the desert of Chalcis, to experience what he expected to be the challenging and spiritually uplifting conditions of solitary asceticism. He was to be disappointed in this, however, for the place was overcrowded with quarrelsome monks and he left the place, as previously noted, in 377.

It was at Rome, on his return to the city in the early 380s, that Jerome's ideas on asceticism became more clearly focused. This was partly achieved by the group of wealthy women with whom Jerome became close, and partly as a result of controversy. He became the spiritual adviser to the Christian noble house of the Aemilii which included Paula, and her daughters Eustochium and Blesilla. He instructed them in asceticism as well as Bible study. Jerome described Paula as mourning and fasting, squalid with dirt, her eyes dim with weeping, praying for divine mercy all night (*Epistle* 108.26). The women in Jerome's group lived, in many ways, like nuns. They withdrew, in varying degrees, from ordinary society, practised prolonged fasting, wore coarse clothing, neglected their personal appearance, and avoided comforts

like baths. Above all, they practised chastity – the elimination as far as possible of the sexual element of life. Jerome urged Eustochium, for instance (*Epistle* 22),⁴ to repress sexual ideas as soon as they arose in the mind. Wine was to be avoided because it stimulated sexual desire; rich or abundant food could be equally exciting and should be avoided. Virgins should not associate with married men or women, as their company would only remind them of what they had renounced. A virgin should have a dedicated woman as a companion, and ought to keep to her own room as much as possible, filling her days and nights with prayer and Bible reading. She should be thoughtful and humble in her conduct and dress, and should always take the Blessed Virgin as her example.

Jerome had a great victory over the lay theologian Helvidius, who taught that Mary had enjoyed a normal family life after the birth of Jesus, and therefore that marriage was just as high a state as celibacy. Helvidius was thus attacking the key argument of those who propounded celibacy as a valid way of Christian life; namely, that Mary was perpetually virgin. Jerome maintained, in *Against Helvidius on the Perpetual Virginity of Mary* (composed in Rome in 383), that all the biblical passages concerning the 'brothers' of Jesus did not imply a blood relationship, but rather that they were his 'cousins'. As for the celibate state, its superiority over marriage was proven by the fact that not only Mary but Joseph also was a life-long virgin. This superiority is confirmed both by Paul's warning that married people cannot give God their undivided attention, and by the everyday observation that married people are distracted by mundane things. This was the earliest work by a Latin writer specifically on Mariology, and Jerome's teaching became the official orthodoxy, with celibacy hailed as the noblest state.

Later, in 393, Jerome wrote a treatise, *Against Jovinian*, an apostate Roman monk who held views similar to those of Helvidius. Jovinian taught four theses: first, that virginity was not a higher state than marriage; second, that those who were baptized could not be influenced by the Devil to sin; third, that fasting brought no special reward; and finally, that those who remained faithful to their baptism all enjoyed the same heavenly rewards. Jerome's reply to these theses is contained in two books, the whole of the first of which is concerned with Jovinian's first proposition. The other three are answered in the second book. Once again, Jerome skilfully deployed arguments based on scriptural exegesis to counter his opponent. Jerome pointed out that Adam and Eve embarked upon marriage only after their sin, and that, while marriage was intended to 'replenish the earth' (Gen. 1:28), 'virginity replenishes paradise' (*Against Jovinian* 1.16). He claims that the figures closest to God in the Bible were all virgins (e.g. Joshua, Elijah, John the Baptist), that Peter was married before he heard the Gospel; his statement in Matt. 19:27 that 'We have left all and followed you' proved that, once he became a disciple of Jesus, he abandoned it (*Against Jovinian* 1.26). This powerful and sustained defence of virginity probably did more than anything else Jerome wrote on this subject to establish asceticism as the norm of Christian life in the West.

Another aspect of his asceticism was the need he felt to give up his intense interest in, and love for, classical literature to concentrate on scripture and Christian writings. In one famous letter (*Epistle* 22) he recounts a dream in which he was taken before God in heaven; asked to say who he was he replied, *Christianus sum* ('I am a

Christian') only to be contradicted with the words, 'Non es Christianus, tu es Ciceronianus' ('You are not a Christian, you are a Ciceronian'). Many European paintings of Jerome depict him in the desert beating himself with a stone to drive the temptation to classical literature from his breast.

JEROME AS BIBLICAL INTERPRETER AND TRANSLATOR

The Roman empire into which Jerome was born had been changing rapidly. The Christian emperor, Constantine the Great, had pushed through policies that favoured Christianity, and many churches were built throughout the empire. Constantine's benevolent actions, and those of his successors, had a dramatic effect on the church. Instead of being persecuted, the church now enjoyed many privileges and it was increasingly to have an influential role in society. Christianity was becoming more and more popular and respectable and, consequently, people were streaming into the church. One result of this was that the church population wanted to learn more about the scriptures, and scholars like Jerome had an important function to fulfil by writing commentaries to explain the biblical books.

Jewish Bible interpretation

Jerome inherited a long tradition of biblical interpretation, both Jewish and Christian. In Judaism, rabbinic scholars had developed a system of interpretative rules and techniques for studying biblical texts. These may be broadly classified under two headings: haggadah and halakhah. Haggadah ('information' or 'anecdote') is seen largely in collections of midrash (a kind of commentary on scripture) and often takes the form of moralizing exegesis. Various techniques were used to achieve this, including juxtaposing originally discrete biblical texts, creative elaboration of the biblical narrative and the use of parable. This midrashic method could provide profound theological insights. Jerome used a great deal of haggadic material in his works, and he was the main source through which echoes of the haggadah reached some of the western Church Fathers. Halakhah ('procedure') was concerned with the implementation of the Torah, the Jewish law, in relation to practical matters, and with ensuring that the Torah could be successfully adapted to the changing conditions in the life of Jews. Jerome often used this halakhic principle in his own exegesis of scripture.

One Jewish scholar who found favour with Jerome was Philo of Alexandria. He calls Philo an 'ecclesiastical' writer, on the grounds that Philo praises Christians at Alexandria and mentions that Christianity is present in other provinces (Jerome, *De viris illustribus* 111). Philo had been aware of haggadic and halakhic traditions, but found that the 'impossibilities' and 'absurdities' produced by a literal reading of scripture could be unravelled by using an allegorical method based on Stoic ethics and Platonic cosmology. By searching carefully in scripture for clues like contradictions, strange expressions, word derivations and mysterious numbers, the interpreter could discover the 'real' message which God intended to convey.

Alexandria and Antioch

This allegorical interpretation of biblical texts spread from Philo to Christianity and became widely used by the catechetical school at Alexandria, particularly by its two greatest scholars, Clement and Origen. For Clement, most of scripture was expressed in enigmas, and it was the task of the interpreter who had received the deeper knowledge (*gnosis*) given by Christ to his apostles after the resurrection, to unlock the spiritual truth of biblical language to those capable of understanding. Following Philo, Clement allegorized the Old Testament freely. His hermeneutical principle for identifying true meaning was an eclectic mixture of Hellenistic (and gnostic) cosmology, soteriology and morality, combined with the conviction that, in the Logos-Christ, all foreshadowing of truth had found its goal.

Although Jerome spoke approvingly of Clement, it is clear that he was much more profoundly influenced by the other great Alexandrian exegete, Origen. Much of Origen's huge literary output was devoted to the interpretation of the Bible. Jerome classified Origen's works into three categories: scholia (short explanatory glosses), commentaries and homilies. Most of the biblical books were dealt with by Origen in one or more of these forms. In his treatise, *De Principiis*, Origen had set out to show systematically how the diversity of the world came about, and how it would eventually return to a divine unity. Fundamental to this structure was the role of scripture and its interpretation. The divinely inspired scriptures had a spiritual purpose; therefore to give them a simplistic understanding was to insult the divine author of the writings. Origen argued that texts like Prov. 22:20f. suggested a threefold sense of scripture analogous to the tripartite anthropology of the philosophers: just as humans consisted of body, soul and spirit, so scripture had a literal, moral and spiritual sense. All biblical texts had a spiritual sense, though not all had a literal one. If no spiritual sense was apparent on the surface, the interpreter must understand the surface sense symbolically. Allegory was the method which would provide the key to unlock the hidden, symbolic meaning of texts, and it was Origen whose influence made allegory the dominant method of biblical interpretation down to the Middle Ages. Jerome was responsible, to an extent, for ensuring that Origen's writings were transmitted to the western church, thus disseminating more widely Origen's allegorizing exegesis.

Not all Christian scholars were convinced, however, that allegorical exegesis was the best method of discovering the truth of scripture. The 'school' of Antioch developed in reaction against the allegorising tendencies of Alexandria. The school's early history is associated with the name of Lucian, the teacher of Arius, but the most influential Antiochenes were Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia and John Chrysostom. The Antiochenes insisted on the historical basis of the text of scripture and that, wherever possible, it should be interpreted literally. Only where this could not be done was the typological or allegorical sense to be explored. The Antiochene emphasis on the literal or historical sense is seen in Lucian's emphasis on the details of the text of scripture. He knew Hebrew and corrected the Septuagint from the original Hebrew. Jerome praised this recension and used it widely in his own work on the biblical text.

Jerome and Hebrew

Before it was possible to interpret the text properly, it was necessary to have the best text available. The inescapable conclusion for Jerome was that he had to learn the original biblical languages. As far as the New Testament was concerned, Jerome encountered no problems, for he had learnt Greek at school, and had attended the lectures of Gregory of Nazianzus in Constantinople. But for the text of the Old Testament, Jerome was faced with a considerable hurdle for, apart from Origen, very few other Christian scholars had any knowledge of Hebrew. Jerome took lessons in Hebrew from a Jewish convert to Christianity, and it is clear that he found it a difficult language to master. It must be remembered that no grammars or concordances were available, so he had to learn the language orally, memorizing the sounds of the consonants and vocabulary. Presumably, he practised writing the Hebrew characters by copying out manuscripts. Of his Hebrew studies, Jerome says: 'What labour I spent on this task, what difficulties I went through, how often I despaired and how often I gave up and in my eagerness to learn, started again' (*Epistle* 125.12).

Jerome believed, along with the rest of the ancient Jewish and Christian world, that Hebrew was the world's original language. Despite its antiquity, however, Jerome found Hebrew a barbarous language, which affected his Latin style. In the preface to his *Commentary on Galatians*, Jerome apologizes for his unliterary style, blaming it partly on eye trouble and problems with copyists, but also on his study of Hebrew: 'I leave it to others to judge how far my unflagging study of Hebrew has profited me; what I have lost in my own language, I can tell.'

It is clear that Jerome had a much more extensive and profound knowledge of Hebrew than did any other Christian scholar, including Origen. Jerome had the same quantitative use of Hebrew as did Origen, but he added to it a qualitative use of Hebrew as a guide to the right *meanings* (Barr 1966: 282). This qualitative use of Hebrew manifests itself in various ways. The very fact, for instance, that Jerome undertook the task of translating the Old Testament from Hebrew points towards his possessing a high degree of ability in Hebrew. Ever bearing in mind that he had the previous Greek translations of Theodotion, Symmachus and especially of Aquila, which must have been of considerable value to him, Jerome's own translation from the Hebrew was a quite remarkable achievement, especially when it is seen to be a generally accurate and faithful translation. A second way of showing Jerome's extensive understanding of Hebrew is to look at his vocalizations of Hebrew. The Hebrew text with which Jerome worked would have been unpointed (that is, without vowels). This means that distinctions in meaning could be brought about by different vocalizations of the same consonants. The following example comes from Jerome's *Commentary on Jeremiah*:

The Hebrew word, which is written with the three letters 'd-b-r' (it has no vowels in it) according to the natural progression of the passage and the judgement of the reader, if 'dabar' is read it means 'word'; if 'deber', it means 'death'; and if 'dabber', it means 'speak' (9.22).

In an unvocalized text, all three words ('dabar', 'deber' and 'dabber') would have been identical in Hebrew. It would only have been possible to discern the correct

grammatical construction (the first two are nouns, the third is a verb) and the meaning of the word by studying its position in the sentence. In this example, Jerome is combating the incorrect translations of this word which had appeared in the Greek versions, which implied different vocalizations. The Septuagint omitted the word; Origen's *Hexapla* had interpreted it as 'death'; Aquila had understood it as 'speak', as had Symmachus. It has been suggested that Jerome may have been influenced here by the Jewish *al-tiqre* interpretation (Barr 1966: 282). This means 'do not read [the word in the text] but [another similar one]'. It was a midrashic technique used to introduce alternative readings to a text for purely homiletical purposes. It was understood as a legitimate extension of the literal exegesis of a passage. It seems unlikely in this case, as, if Jerome had been using this technique, he would have used the different possibilities of vocalization in his own interpretation. It is more likely that Jerome is merely revelling in his good knowledge of Hebrew and showing off to his Christian readers by exhibiting his mastery of the language. It was this extensive knowledge of Hebrew that helped Jerome so much in his major task of translating the Bible from its original languages.

Textual criticism

As an essential part of producing an accurate translation of the Bible, Jerome had to be assured that he was working with the best possible text. Jerome, more than any other Church Father of the first five centuries, was very well versed in the principles and techniques of textual criticism (Hulley 1944). It is largely due to his labours in this area that scholars today can ascertain accurately the state of the text of the Old Testament, Septuagint, Hexapla and New Testament in the fourth century.

Jerome acquired an interest in manuscripts and books early in his adult life. Before the end of his formal education, he had made copies of classical authors, and soon after he left Rome, he labouriously copied out Hilary of Poitiers' commentaries on the Psalms and the *De Synodis*.⁵ During his travels, Jerome collected many manuscripts of biblical and other material. One of the most advantageous from this point of view was his visit to the famous library at Caesarea, which had been assembled by the priest and martyr Pamphilus, friend of Eusebius of Caesarea. Jerome relates that Pamphilus was 'so impassioned with sacred literature that he himself transcribed the greater part of the works of Origen, and these are still preserved today in the library at Caesarea' (*De viris Illustribus* 3).

Jerome became very attached to the manuscripts he had collected, and took them with him when he moved from place to place. In a letter to Paul of Concordia, Jerome suggested that they could make a mutually beneficial arrangement, whereby Jerome would send Paul a copy of his newly composed treatise, the *Life of Paul the Hermit*, if, in return, Paul – who owned a substantial library himself – would provide Jerome with copies of several books, including the commentaries of Fortunatian, the *History* of Aurelius Victor and the letters of Novatian, so that Jerome might increase his personal collection. Unfortunately, we do not know whether the deal was closed and the books exchanged (see *Ep.* 22.30 and *Ep.* 10.3).

Textual criticism is fundamentally concerned with variant readings in texts.

Jerome realized this and asked where these variant readings came from and why they arose. As far as Jerome was concerned, the text critic's task was to remove any errors in a text and to establish a trustworthy one. Many errors were produced – either accidentally or intentionally – by careless or incompetent copyists. Jerome observed that some copyists did not pay attention to their work and even went to sleep over it, or they carelessly changed the reading, writing not what was in front of them, but what they understood. So, at *Commentary on Matthew* 13:35, Jerome noted that the copyist wrote 'Isaiah' instead of 'Asaph', because the former name was more familiar to him and he believed the previous copyist to have been mistaken. In addition to general comments about the causes of errors in texts, Jerome frequently mentioned detailed causes of corruption. Punctuation, for example, was very important for understanding a passage correctly, and faulty punctuation may be a cause of error. The confusion of number symbols was another cause of error. Jerome made the interesting suggestion that the reason why the evangelist Mark seems to disagree with Matthew and John about the exact time of Jesus' crucifixion was due to a copyist's error. Jerome says that the copyist confused the number symbols *S'* and *Y'* and therefore produced an error in the text (*Tractatus in Psalmos* 77). Jerome also mentions that copyists could easily confuse similar letters. Most of his references to this relate to the confusion of Hebrew letters by the translators of the Septuagint, especially the letters *resh* and *daleth*, distinguished only by a small stroke, and the letters *yod* and *vau*, which differ, he says, only in size. Also noticed by Jerome are occasional examples of dittography and haplography, metathesis of letters, assimilation, omission of words and transposition (Brown 1993: 36–7).

One of the areas Jerome would have to approach in writing a commentary on a biblical book was that of authorship, and the authenticity or otherwise of sections of particular books. Although he does not use the terms, Jerome utilizes two criteria for deciding on these issues: internal and external evidence.

With regard to external evidence, one method of ensuring the authenticity of a writing is the *subscriptio*. The apostle Paul, Jerome reported, had used his signature, along with a few words, to take away from false teachers any opportunity of tampering with his own doctrines (*Commentary on Galatians* 6:11). The subscription, however, was not a very good criterion by which to judge a book's authenticity. The signature could be forged or imitated. Another criterion was the *anulus signatorius*, or 'seal' which one put on letters or other works.

Jerome attaches great value to the internal evidence in a work when it comes to verifying its authenticity. First, one must determine whether the contents are consistent with those of its supposed author. For instance, with a book by the Pythagorean author and philosopher, Sixtus, whom Jerome's erstwhile friend Rufinus equates with the Christian martyr, Sixtus, Jerome applies this criterion and establishes that in the entire volume there is no mention of Christ or the apostles. How, then, could it have been written by a Christian martyr (see the preface to his *Commentary on Philemon*)?

When Jerome discusses the suspicions concerning the authorship of the Letter to Philemon, he again uses the criterion of internal evidence. Certain contemporary critics held that it was not Pauline because of its brevity, its seemingly inferior subject matter, and its mundane tone. Jerome, however, argues strongly that if this

letter is rejected because of its brevity, then others must also be rejected – for instance Obadiah, Nahum and Zephaniah. He also states that brevity in a document which has in it so much of the beauty of the gospel, is a sign of its inspiration. Further, many of the other (undisputed) epistles mention mundane, worldly matters, like the cloak left at Troas (2 Tim. 4:13). To suppose that common life is distinct and separate from God is to approach the heresy of Manichaeism, Jerome warns. Should these powerful arguments based on internal evidence not be enough to convince some people, Jerome also uses one piece of external evidence – he says that Marcion, who altered many of the epistles of Paul, did not touch the letter to Philemon, believing it to be genuinely by Paul. If even Marcion believed it to be authentic, Jerome says, then no orthodox Christian should have any reason to doubt it (Preface to the *Commentary on Philemon*).

Jerome never discusses systematically his principles of textual criticism, and this is really because he saw the text critic's task to be a practical one – to establish the correct text. Without the correct text, it was impossible to have any real understanding of its meaning, and this was of paramount importance for Jerome. For his understanding of scripture, this meant that textual criticism preceded the task of translating the biblical texts, and it was only when both of these had been accomplished that true understanding would be achieved.

The Vulgate translation

Jerome was, as he himself says, a *vir trilinguis*, knowing Hebrew, Greek and Latin. One of the greatest achievements for which Jerome is remembered is the translation of the Bible known as the 'Vulgate'. This term comes from the Latin 'vulgata', meaning 'common'. It is used of the Latin version of the Bible followed by the Roman Catholic church, often attributed to Jerome. Jerome used the term himself to refer to his own translation of the Bible, because he wanted to make the scriptural texts available to everyone, not just to scholars who could understand Greek and Hebrew (Sutcliffe 1948: 250). Jerome, more than any other single person, was responsible for fixing the literary form of the Bible of the entire western church. The complicated history of the Vulgate translation and Jerome's involvement in it began in 383, when Pope Damasus came to the conclusion that, because of the proliferation of variant readings in the Latin Bible of the day, a thorough revision was a *desideratum*. For this task, he commissioned Jerome. Although we do not have the actual words of his commission, we get a very clear idea of his wishes from Jerome's *Preface to the Four Gospels*. He says:

You urge me to compose a new work from the old, and, as it were, to sit in judgement on the copies of the scriptures which are now scattered throughout the world; and, insofar as they differ from one another, you would have me decide which of them agree with the Greek original. The labour is one of love, but at the same time dangerous and presumptuous; for in judging others I must in turn be judged by all; and how can I change the language of the world at this late stage, and carry it back to its early childhood? Is there a man, learned or otherwise, who, when he takes the volume in his hands and sees that

what he reads does not suit his settled tastes, will not break out immediately into violent language and call me a forger and a profane person for having had the audacity to add anything to the ancient books, or to make any changes or corrections to them?

Jerome, however, was prepared to risk castigation in this way for two reasons. First, he explains, is the pope's command. Second, was the great diversity of Old Latin manuscripts. He exclaims that there were 'almost as many forms of text as there are manuscripts'. Jerome's younger contemporary, Augustine, confirms this fact when he laments:

Those who translated the scriptures from Hebrew into Greek may be counted, but the Latin translators are without number. For in the early days of the faith, every man who happened to get hold of a Greek manuscript (of the New Testament) and who imagined he had any facility in both languages, however slight that might have been, dared to make a translation.

De doctrina Christiana 2.16).

Jerome's and Augustine's statements were not mere hyperbole, but based on sound factual information. The Old Latin version was begun in the second century, simultaneously in Africa and western Europe. By the fourth century, it existed in a bewildering number of forms, showing a huge number of variant readings. This was partly because the task of translation had been undertaken by different scholars at different times in different areas, and partly because of errors in translation and careless transcription. The Latin of these early versions was very odd, as the language was adapted to Christian usage, with special vocabulary created for the new translation (Brown 1993: 98–9). The idiom of this form of Latin often recalled the Greek on which the Christian vocabulary was based, and, because it was written for uneducated people, it had a strongly colloquial feel (Metzger 1977: 285–330).

Jerome's statement concerning the many text-types of the Old Latin version would also seem to be substantiated, for the modern scholarly consensus distinguishes four main text-types among Old Latin manuscripts: African, European, Italian and Spanish.⁶

Faced with a bewildering array of variant readings and different text-types, Jerome prepared to carry out Pope Damasus' wish to revise the Latin Bible and create (or re-create) a uniform text. Naturally enough, he began his revision with the four gospels. Pope Damasus did not commission Jerome to make a *fresh translation* of the Bible, but Jerome found himself checking the accuracy of the Latin text by referring constantly to the Greek original. He was conscious, however, of his commission to *revise* the existing Old Latin version, and changed this text only when it was necessary. He finished his revision of the four gospels and presented it to the pope in 384, shortly before the latter's death.

That Jerome revised the four gospels is certain. Less certain, however, is how much of the remainder of the Old Latin New Testament Jerome revised. In *On Famous Men* and elsewhere, he claims to have 'restored the New Testament to its Greek original'. Scholars have expressed opposing views on Jerome's statement. Some, notably Dom J. Chapman (1923), believed that Jerome did, in fact, revise the

whole of the New Testament. Chapman argued that Jerome's quotations from Paul in *Epistle* 27 show his intention of publishing soon a revision of the Pauline epistles, that the lack of prefaces to the New Testament other than the gospels can be explained easily – because the pope, for whom Jerome was making the revision, died soon after the gospels had been revised, Jerome did not wish to write prefaces to anyone else. Chapman also attempts to explain why Jerome's quotations from the Pauline epistles often differ from those in the Vulgate: he often quotes readings with which he disagrees and he may have thought a certain reading to be a fairly good one, his own suggestion being meant only to explain the real force of the Greek, not to serve as a tolerable Latin rendering. Jerome is often inconsistent anyway, and the differences between the Vulgate readings and those found in Jerome's works do not necessarily prove that he was not the author of the Vulgate of the Pauline epistles. Chapman cites examples from the gospels which vary from the Vulgate. Those who argue that Jerome did not revise the text of the Pauline epistles because his quotations differ from the Vulgate, must also conclude that he did not revise the text of the gospels, which is absurd. Stylistically, he says, the Vulgate New Testament is the work of a single author and that author must be Jerome. Furthermore, Jerome is always accurate when enumerating his own works, so when he says he had revised the whole New Testament, he must have done. Chapman dates the revision of the complete New Testament to 391.

This traditional belief that Jerome revised the text of the complete New Testament has been seriously questioned by other scholars. F. Cavallera made a detailed study of the Vulgate of Acts, the Pauline epistles and Revelation and noted especially the discrepancies between the Vulgate and quotations in Jerome's works (1922). Sometimes Jerome employs a text which coincides more or less with the Vulgate, but more often he quotes one which differs. Sometimes he rejects readings which are found in the Vulgate. It is very important in this context that, in his commentaries on Galatians, Ephesians, Philemon and Titus, written *c.* 387, shortly after his supposed revision of these letters, he never attributes the Latin text he uses to himself, but, on the contrary, often uses the phrase '*Latinus interpres*' of the translator. He sometimes disagrees with their readings. More recently, J. N. D. Kelly has stated his opinion that the style of the Vulgate of Acts is against Jerome's authorship. Kelly has also asserted categorically that 'the only tenable conclusion is that Jerome, for whatever reason, abandoned the idea of revising the rest of the New Testament (if indeed he ever entertained it at all) once he had completed the gospels' (1975: 88).

Before he left Rome in 385, after having revised the text of the gospels, Jerome revised the Latin text of the Psalter according to the Septuagint. He says that he revised this book very quickly, but made substantial changes. This revision used to be identified as the 'Roman Psalter', but recent work has indicated that, while the Roman Psalter is not the version which Jerome made at Rome in 384, it may well represent the text on which he worked and which he corrected. A few years later (*c.* 387–8), Jerome made another translation of the Psalms, this time using Origen's Hexaplaric Septuagint text as his basis. This version is known as the 'Gallican Psalter', as it was first accepted for use in the churches of Gaul. It also remained in greater use than his later translation of the Psalms from Hebrew, and so became

included in the official Vulgate edition of the Bible, ratified by the Council of Trent. In this 'Gallican Psalter', Jerome included Origen's diacritical signs, which were intended to show where the Septuagint text differed from the Hebrew original.

In the same period, Jerome also translated the books of Job, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. The Psalter, Job (in two manuscripts) and (in only one manuscript) Song of Songs, are all that remain of this translation of parts of the Old Testament from Origen's critical Hexaplaric Septuagint text. The other books are not now extant. In 416, when Augustine asked to consult Jerome's revised Septuagint, the latter had to inform the African bishop that, due to someone's deceit, he no longer had a copy of the other books.

By 390, Jerome had become convinced of the necessity to make a fresh translation of the Old Testament from the Hebrew text, and, encouraged by friends and the desire to demolish the arguments of the Jews, he began to translate each of the books of the Hebrew canon, a task which was not completed until 406. It is probable that Jerome began this new translation with the books of Samuel and Kings. After explaining that the Hebrew canon has three divisions, Law, Prophets and 'Hagiographa', Jerome goes on to say:

This preface to the scriptures may serve as a 'helmeted' introduction to all the books which I translate from Hebrew into Latin . . . Read first, then, my Samuel and Kings; mine, I say, mine. For whatever by careful translation and cautious correction I have learnt and comprehended, is my very own. And when you understand anything of which you were ignorant before, either (if you are grateful) consider me a translator, or (if ungrateful) a paraphraser, although I am not at all conscious of having deviated from the Hebrew original.

(Preface to Samuel and Kings)

It sounds as if Jerome is writing this preface as a general introduction to his whole translation of the Old Testament, discussing the contents and limits of the Old Testament canon. He refers to the preface as 'helmeted' (*galeatus*) because he arms himself in advance to defend himself from the critics he knows will rise up against him.

Soon after he had finished the translation of Samuel and Kings, Jerome started on Job, the Psalter and the Prophets. His friend Sophronius made an 'elegant Greek translation' of Jerome's rendering of Job and the Psalter, and in *Epistle* 49, composed in 393–4, he informs Pammachius that he has translated the 16 prophets (thus including Daniel) and Job, of which he will be able to borrow a copy from his cousin Marcella. Of this book, Jerome says: 'Read it both in Greek and Latin, and compare the old version with my rendering. You will then see clearly that the difference between them is that between truth and falsehood.' He also tells Pammachius that he has translated Samuel and Kings. The omission of Psalms must have been an oversight on Jerome's part. Ezra, Nahum and Chronicles were translated in 394–5.

It was not until late 404 and early 405 that Jerome translated any more of the Hebrew Old Testament. He gives no reason for the long delay in completing the project, but it is very probably due to his involvement in the Origenist controversy

from 393 till 402–3, and also to the fact that he wrote several commentaries in this period. He first translated the Pentateuch, having been asked to by his friend Desiderius. His preface makes it clear that he thinks there is still a good deal to be done before his translation of the Old Testament would be complete.

Next, he translated Joshua, Judges and Ruth, in early 405. In the preface, he expresses his relief at having finished the Pentateuch: 'Having at last finished Moses' Pentateuch, I feel like a man released from a crippling load of debt.' The rest of the Old Testament books were completed by early 406, thus bringing a labour of some 14 years to an end.

Implications for the canon

One of the major results of Jerome's translations of biblical books was the resolution (to his own satisfaction) of the question of the canon of scripture. In Jerome's early works, he often quotes from 'apocryphal' books; that is, books which were not in the Hebrew Bible, but were accepted by Christians because they were included in the Septuagint version. The Greek Septuagint had been the accepted Christian version of the Old Testament since the second century, and it had taken on the mantle of divine inspiration. Several different versions of the Greek Old Testament existed in Jerome's day, and this diversity was one of the main reasons that he undertook the long task of translating the biblical books from the original languages. His most balanced statement on the relation between his translation from Hebrew and the older versions is seen in the *Preface to Samuel and Kings*:

I beg you, brother, not to think that my work is in any way meant to debase the old translators. Each one offers what he can to the service of the tabernacle of God; some gold and silver and precious stones, others linen and blue and purple and scarlet; we shall do well if we offer skins and goats' hair.

There are several lists of canonical books in Jerome's writings. One such is found in *Epistle* 53.8, where Jerome includes all the books in the Hebrew Bible, but the order in which they are recorded is influenced by the Septuagint canon in two ways. First, the Minor Prophets are placed before the other prophetic books, and second, Daniel is placed at the end of the Prophets, ostensibly as one of them. This is a good example of the ambivalent attitude Jerome showed towards the canon; the serious scholar is influenced by the Hebrew canon, while the churchman cannot stray too far from the revered tradition of the Septuagint canon (Brown 1993: 62–71).

As regards the New Testament canon, Jerome's views are relatively straightforward. He affirms the books which are now in the New Testament canon, with the possible exception of 2 and 3 John, concerning which he expresses some doubt about whether they were composed by John the apostle or John the presbyter. However, he includes both in the canon (*de viris illustribus* 9). He did much to stabilize the opinion of the western church concerning the position of the epistle to the Hebrews and the book of Revelation. He recognized that various sections of the church rejected these books because of doubt concerning their apostolic authorship, but says:

The epistle called 'to the Hebrews' is received not only by the churches in the east, but also by all church writers of the Greek language before our own time, as being written by Paul the apostle, though many think that it is by Barnabas or Clement. And it makes no difference whose it is, since it is from a churchman, and is celebrated in the daily readings of the churches. And if the usage of the Latins does not receive it among the canonical scriptures, neither do the Greek churches receive the Revelation of John. And yet we receive both, because we do not follow today's habit, but the authority of ancient writers, who for the most part quote each of them . . . as canonical and churchly.⁷

Other translation work

Jerome did not restrict his translation activities solely to scripture. He is also responsible for translating into Latin a considerable number of Greek theological works (Brown 1993: 91–6; Kelly 1975: 73–7). The first of these translations was made in 380, when he rendered Eusebius of Caesarea's *Chronicle* into Latin. Having spent several years studying the works of Greek theologians, Jerome was apparently anxious that the Latin-speaking world should have the opportunity of benefiting from their scholarship. Interestingly enough, Jerome was not content, with this particular work, simply to translate; he omitted sections he thought unnecessary and added a new section, bringing the *Chronicle* up to date and thereby providing the western world with a history of the world from Abraham to 379.

Jerome then turned to translating into Latin the works of Origen, from whose exegetical writings he had learned so much. Jerome was interested in translating most, if not all, of Origen's works, but was prevented from doing so by a painful eye irritation caused by constant reading, and by a lack of copyists owing to a shortage of money. Jerome did succeed, however, in translating quite a number of Origen's homilies. He also translated a work of Didymus the Blind, *On the Holy Spirit*, from Greek into Latin. This work, along with some of Origen's homilies, is now lost in Greek, and Jerome's translation is the only way we can know these important works today.

Biblical commentaries

By far the major part of Jerome's literary output is in commentary form. He states that the purpose of a commentary is 'to discuss what is obscure, to touch on the obvious, to dwell at length on what is doubtful' (*Commentary on Galatians* 4.6). Scripture, for Jerome, was full of obscurities and a reliable guide is needed. A commentary ought to 'repeat the opinions of the many . . . so that the judicious reader, when he has perused the different explanations . . . may judge which is the best and, like a good banker, reject the money from a spurious mint' (*Apology against Rufinus* 1.16).

In most of his commentaries, Jerome acknowledges the previous authors from whom he has borrowed, and they are valuable because they transmit a great wealth of comments from other scholars, some of which would otherwise have been lost.

Jerome wrote commentaries on almost all the books of the Old Testament, and on

some of the New Testament. One of Jerome's earliest works was the *Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, which was more a grammatical and etymological study of some passages in Genesis. He paid special attention to the (supposed) meaning and etymology of Hebrew words, and intended it to be the first of a series of such volumes. He dropped this project, however, when he began his translation of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. The work dates from about 390 (Hayward 1995: 23–7). A little earlier, in 386–7, Jerome wrote his *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, dedicated to the young widow Blesilla, whom Jerome had taught in Rome. He used Origen as his main source, but the short work shows some traces of originality. It is based on the Hebrew text.

During the period 391 and 406, Jerome wrote commentaries on all the Minor Prophets. Most notable among these is the *Commentary on Jonah*. It is interesting because it follows earlier Christian exegesis of this story in seeing in Jonah a pre-figurement of Christ and his resurrection. He translated it first from the Hebrew and then from the Greek text, and gave a double exegesis, first literal then spiritual. Jerome treated the story as genuinely historical and argued strongly that Jonah really did spend three days in the belly of the whale. On the spiritual level, he argued for Jonah as a 'type' of Christ, and interpreted many of the details of the story in this light. Thus Jonah's fleeing from the Lord's face points to the Son's descent from the heavenly realm, and his preaching to Nineveh points to Christ's post-resurrection command to preach to the nations (Duval 1973).

The *Commentary on Daniel*, composed in 407, is a study of selected passages from Daniel, based on Jerome's own translation from the Hebrew. This is one of Jerome's most interesting commentaries, for he spends much of the book criticizing the anti-Christian polemic of the third century Neoplatonist philosopher, Porphyry. The latter had argued (correctly) that Daniel was not a prophecy dating from the sixth century BCE, but rather a tract for the times, written to encourage Jews who were suffering persecution at the hands of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 167–164 BCE. Jerome, on the other hand, rejected this interpretation and argued that the revelation of Christ was to be found throughout the book. So, for instance, he suggests that 'the stone . . . cut from a mountain by no human hand' (Dan. 2:45), was none other than the Saviour who was conceived without human intercourse.⁸

Jerome's most extensive commentary was on Isaiah, finished in 410, and consisting of 18 books, each with its own preface. Jerome laboured under the false impression that Isaiah was the work of one man, but followed his normal practice of alternating literal and spiritual exegesis, although he reproduced the Greek version only where it differed significantly from the Hebrew, in order to avoid excessive length (Jay 1985).

Jerome's final commentary on the Old Testament was his unfinished work on Jeremiah. This was begun in 414 or 415, and was interrupted by Jerome's involvement in the Pelagian controversy. The commentary covers only 32 of Jeremiah's 52 chapters, but contains several interesting features. There is an increasing emphasis on the Hebrew text, and he argues that the LXX text was unreliable as it had been corrupted by copyists (*Commentary on Jeremiah* 17:1–4). Also interesting is the fact that Jerome criticizes his former hero, Origen, very severely. This is probably because of the Pelagians (who considered themselves to be the disciples of Origen),

against whose beliefs Jerome wrote a treatise at this time (*Dialogue against the Pelagians*). A third point of interest in this commentary is the fact that Jerome concentrates on the straight forward, literal interpretation of the text, rather than on allegorical exegesis. This may be partly because of the nature of Jeremiah's text and partly because Jerome was writing for his friend Eusebius of Cremona, who preferred the literal sense (Kelly 1975: 316).

Literal and allegorical exegesis

Jerome assigned great value to the literal sense of scripture. Even in his very first piece of exegesis on the call of Isaiah, Jerome begins with a strictly literal historical exposition of 'who this Uzziah was, how many years he had reigned and who among the other kings were his contemporaries' (*Epistle* 18A.1). Only after this does he move on to the spiritual interpretation of the passage.

Again, in his *Commentary on Ephesians*, composed in 388, Jerome interprets 'Therefore it is said, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light"' by explaining that the words were spoken to Adam who was buried at Calvary where Christ was crucified. The place was called Calvary because the head of some ancient man had been buried there and because, when Christ was crucified, he was hanging directly above the place where it was buried. It is likely, though Jerome does not acknowledge it, that he was mainly dependent here on a work by Apollinarius of Laodicea.⁹

While Jerome followed the Antiochene school's emphasis on the priority of the historical sense, he nevertheless believed that Christians must go beyond this to discover the fuller, deeper meaning of a passage. It was possible to understand this deeper meaning only with the aid of the allegorical or spiritual method.

When we study Jerome's allegorical exegesis, we see that he takes many of the specific interpretations directly from Origen, even to the extent of verbal borrowing. This is the case both before the Origenist controversy, in which Jerome played a leading part (393–402), and later on, when Jerome had renounced Origen's theology as heretical. The influence of Origen, whom Jerome had once proudly called 'my master', can be seen on almost every page of Jerome's writings.

One example of the influence of Origen is seen in the *Commentary on Matthew*. This is an interesting example because Origen's comments on this gospel are also extant. Jerome wrote his *Commentary on Matthew* in just 14 days, in order to provide a friend with some reading matter on a long sea voyage. In his interpretation of the parable of the hidden treasure (*Commentary on Matthew* 13:44ff.) Jerome has clearly followed Origen, though not slavishly. The main points of their respective interpretations are set out below:

Jerome: The treasure is the word of God which appears to be hidden in the body of Christ, or the holy scriptures in which rests the knowledge of the Saviour. When the treasure is discovered, one must give up all other benefits in order to possess it.

Origen: This is not a parable but a similitude. The field is the scripture. The

treasure is the mysteries lying within the scripture, and finding the treasure a man hides it, thinking it dangerous to reveal to all and sundry the secrets of scripture. He goes, sells all his possessions, and works until he can buy the field, in order that he may possess the great treasure.

Jerome's interpretation appears to have links with Origen, in addition to the similarities one would expect in the interpretation of this parable. Yet Jerome's interpretation is simpler and more direct than that of Origen in its application of the meaning of the parable. Jerome is not interested in Origen's distinction between a parable and a similitude, the latter being a generic term, the former a particular form of similitude. Jerome sets down two different interpretations of the treasure – it is either the word of God hidden in the body of Christ, or it is the knowledge of the Saviour hidden in scripture. His first interpretation does not stem from Origen, but comes rather from Jerome's characteristic ascetic interests.

It is not only specific passages of spiritual interpretation which Jerome borrows from Origen in the *Commentary on Matthew*, but, more significantly, certain themes. One of these, very important for Origen, was the goodness of God, which he used to combat the Gnosticism of the day. This theme is seen running through Jerome's own *Commentary on Matthew*, even though Gnosticism was not a problem against which Jerome had to fight in his own situation.

Towards the end of his life, after the trauma of the Origenist controversy, it is interesting to note that Jerome was more critical of some of Origen's contentions exegetical interpretations, though he continued to use several specific examples of Origen's exegesis. This trend may be seen most clearly in his *Commentary on Jeremiah*, where Origen is denounced as 'that allegorist!', his unorthodox views are fiercely attacked, and where Jerome relies less than in any other commentary on Origen's allegorical interpretations.

Jerome, then, used to his own advantage specific interpretations from representatives of both the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools. He was also the only church Father in the fourth century to learn Hebrew, having taken lessons from leading Jewish scholars.

Use of Jewish interpretations

One of the reasons Jerome is important in the history of biblical interpretation is because he used many Jewish interpretations of scriptural passages. Jerome believed that Jewish traditions of exegesis were of great importance for Christians in their interpretation of the Old Testament, so long as they were consistent with the teaching of the Bible.

In his *Commentary on Daniel* 5:2, Jerome records the following Jewish tradition concerning Belshazzar:

The Hebrews hand down a story of this sort: Belshazzar, thinking that God's promise had remained without effect until the 70th. year, by which Jeremiah had said that the captivity of the Jewish people would have to be ended [cf. Jer. 25:12; 29:10ff.] – a matter of which Zechariah also speaks in the first part of his book [cf. Zech. 1:12ff.] – and turning the occasion of the failed promise

into a celebration, gave a great banquet by way of mocking the expectation of the Jews and the vessels of the Temple of God.

Jeremiah had promised Israel that their exile would be temporary. After 70 years they would return to their own land and glory in the destruction of their oppressors, the Babylonians. The chronological problem is to determine which year begins the 70-year period. In *Megillah* 11b it is explained that Belshazzar began his count with the first year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign (605 BCE). This Rabbinic source explicitly says that Belshazzar was mistaken in his calculations, a point which is implicit in Jerome's statement. The 70-year period should have begun from the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, not the first (cf. 2 Kgs. 24:1).

Scholars studying Jerome's use of rabbinic traditions have usually assumed that he had taken those traditions direct from Jewish sources. There are, however, a few instances where it is clear that he has copied out the Jewish material from the writings of Origen, who also made some use of Jewish traditions.¹⁰ One example is seen in one of his early letters (*Epistle* 18A.15), dealing with the topic of the two Seraphim in Isa. 6:6–9, where Jerome makes a comparison between Isaiah and Moses. He says that he had discussed this with some Jews, and reassures his reader that this tradition comes from an excellent (Jewish) source and should be accepted. Jerome gives the impression that he has gleaned this tradition from direct conversation and study with Jews. In fact, however, he borrowed it from Origen who had reported it in his sixth *Homily on Isaiah*, saying that both Isaiah and Moses had refused God's command at first, on the basis of their unworthiness, but had subsequently accepted.

JEROME THE CONTROVERSIALIST

Jerome several times became involved in theological controversies. As we have seen, he wrote two treatises on virginity, *Against Helvidius on the Perpetual Virginity of Mary*, where he argues against the monk Helvidius that Mary remained a virgin after the birth of Jesus, and *Against Jovinian*, combating the claim that matrimony is a higher state than virginity. He also wrote *Against Vigilantius*, where he vigorously defends the cult of the saints; *Against John of Jerusalem*, in which Jerome became involved in the Origenist controversy; *Apology against Rufinus*, in which Jerome hurls abuse against one of his former friends, following a dispute over the works of Origen; and the *Dialogue against the Pelagians*, Jerome's last polemic, in which he argues against the Pelagian notion that man could live without sin, and on the need for infant baptism.

Some of Jerome's controversies were relatively good-natured. Jerome's younger contemporary, Augustine, initiated a correspondence between the two. Augustine criticized Jerome for taking the position (in *Commentary on Galatians* 2:11) that, when Paul chastised Peter at Antioch over eating food with gentile converts, there was really no difference of opinion between the two apostles. Augustine argued that Jerome's interpretation of this passage showed Paul's rebuke of Peter to have been deliberately simulated. This, according to Augustine, meant that a passage of scrip-

ture contained a falsehood, and this meant that the truth of the *whole* Bible was put in jeopardy. The vagaries of the postal system meant that Jerome did not receive Augustine's criticisms until years later (see Kelly 1975: 265–7). When he did finally reply, Jerome essentially ignored Augustine's criticism, but made a veiled warning that, if the younger man persisted in criticizing his exegesis, he could expect much harsher treatment in future.

Jerome's other 'controversial' writings were more bitter. These polemical works do not reveal Jerome as a deeply speculative or innovative thinker, but rather as a vigorous and vitriolic defender of the faith and of his own reputation. The most important theologically was his involvement in the 'Origenist' controversy. Jerome had been an admirer of Origen, but, when the dispute between Epiphanius, the fanatical bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, and bishop John of Jerusalem broke, Jerome sided with the former, while Jerome's old friend Rufinus took the side of the latter. Jerome was more concerned to justify his own reputation as an orthodox thinker rather than with the question of Origen's orthodoxy. Jerome wrote:

I revered him [Origen] as an exegete, not as a theologian – for his genius not his faith, as a philosopher rather than an apostle; believe me I have never been an Origenist.

(*Epistle* 46)

Early in 397, Jerome wrote a ferocious attack on bishop John of Jerusalem (*Against John of Jerusalem*) in which he demolished John's arguments in favour of Origen, and heaped numerous insults on John personally. Jerome found the bishop's beliefs dangerously ambiguous, avoiding the real issues in the dispute and riddled with heresy. On the crucial issue of the state of the body of Christ and of Christians after the resurrection, Jerome was at pains to show, in an extended analytical passage, that John's teaching was hopelessly inadequate; he had always spoken of the resurrection of the body, never of the resurrection of the flesh (*Against John of Jerusalem* 23–6). Jerome ridiculed John on a personal level, labelling him as grovelling, arrogant and insufferably proud.

Jerome and John of Jerusalem were finally reconciled later in 397 in the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem. He was never to be reconciled with his erstwhile friend, Rufinus, however. In 398, Rufinus translated Origen's *On First Principles*, and composed *The Falsification of the Works of Origen*, in which he propounded the thesis that Origen's writings had been interpolated wholesale by heretics, and that this accounted for all the unorthodox passages. Jerome was incensed both by the translation and by Rufinus' support for Origen. He immediately produced his own literal translation of *On First Principles* and wrote a scathing letter (*Epistle* 84) in which he set out his own attitude to Origen, playing down his early enthusiasm, and appealing to some of his own commentaries to justify his acceptance of some of Origen's judgements and interpretations, but not his doctrines. Rufinus countered with the *Apology against Jerome* in 401, charging Jerome with adapting and reproducing uncritically some of Origen's worst theses. Rufinus argued that, if Jerome was denouncing Origen, he was really denouncing himself.

Jerome's reply came immediately and was full of indignant rage. This two part invective firstly justified Jerome's own actions, and then launched into a violent

castigation of Rufinus. In the following year, Jerome added a third part to this tirade against Rufinus. This has been described as 'quite extreme in its violence' (Murphy 1952: 153). It added little to what he had already written in the *Apology against Rufinus*, reinforcing the charges of heresy, falsehood and provocative translations. It is a bitter, malicious and spiteful attack on Rufinus' person. Rufinus did not reply to this work, but Jerome continued to direct abuse at him even after Rufinus' death.

What Jerome's part in the Origenist controversy shows is the depths to which he was prepared to sink in order to uphold what he believed to be orthodox Christian beliefs as well as his own reputation as a biblical scholar and orthodox believer.

JEROME THE PERSON AND HIS LEGACY

As a man, Jerome was prodigiously hard-working, often studying or writing into the early hours, labouring, even when ill, to finish letters or larger works. He composed the *Commentary on Matthew* in just two weeks, for instance, so that his friend Eusebius of Cremona would have something to read on an imminent sea voyage. He had to work at astonishing speed to get this finished on time, and it should be no surprise that he made historical errors, and that some parts of the gospel are given very cursory treatment. In many ways, Jerome was not a perfectionist; he did not work and re-work material until it was perfect. Rather, he responded to the immediate needs of his friends, who often asked for advice or help of one sort or another.

Jerome could be, as with Eusebius of Cremona, extremely generous, both with his time and talents. He could also be extremely vicious in his attacks on former friends or teachers. Rufinus, as we have seen, had been a very close friend in Jerome's youth, but Jerome turned against him viciously after the Origenist controversy. Jerome's malicious temperament is also seen during the Origenist controversy in the open hostility he shows towards Origen, the man he had formerly called 'The greatest teacher of the church after the apostles' (Preface to the *Book of the Interpretations of Hebrew Names*). Jerome summarizes the heretical views put forward in *On First Principles* but often distorts Origen's opinions. He unjustly accuses Origen of having denied the Incarnation, misrepresents Origen's views on the salvation of the Devil, the transmigration of souls, and the resurrection (*Epistle* 124.2, 4, 8, 11).

As a scholar, Jerome was essentially eclectic. He searched diligently in the works of others and drew the best points from each, while avoiding their errors. This holds true also of the different 'schools' of interpretation accessible to Jerome — Alexandrian, Antiochene and Jewish.

From the Antiochene school, Jerome learned that an interpreter of the Bible must first study and explain the literal, plain sense and only after this has been accomplished should he venture beyond this to the deeper, spiritual interpretation. From the Alexandrian school, especially from Origen, Jerome borrowed many specific allegorical interpretations. Jerome cites Alexandrian authors much more frequently than he does Antiochenes, but the reason for this is not necessarily that he was more in tune with the principles of the former, but rather that the works of Alexandrian exegetes were more readily accessible to him, and also that the Antiochene school

was still in its youth when Jerome was writing, and had produced a relatively small collection of commentaries from which he could borrow. From Jewish exegesis, Jerome learned the primary importance of the original text of the Old Testament, so that he was unique among the early Church Fathers in his use of the Hebrew text as the basis of his exegesis of the Old Testament.

Even during his lifetime, Jerome was held by many to be a great authority on the interpretation of the Bible. Jerome's contemporary Sulpicius Severus wrote in 405: 'I would be surprised if he [Jerome] were not already known to you through his writings since he is read throughout the world' (*Dialogues* 1.8).

In the centuries following Jerome's death, he was universally acknowledged as the prince of Christian biblical scholars, and his works became a fertile ground for the labours of subsequent exegetes. The reasons for this fame were twofold. First, Jerome's translation of the Bible became accepted everywhere as the standard biblical text in the western church; second, Jerome's immense and intimate knowledge and understanding of the Bible surpassed that of any other Christian scholar for centuries.

Although Jerome wrote commentaries on several of the Pauline letters and on Matthew's gospel, it is for his Old Testament commentaries that he is chiefly remembered. He is the only ancient author who commented on *all* the books of the Major and Minor Prophets. Jerome saw it as his special task to explain these Old Testament books, because they were more difficult to understand than the books of the New Testament. Jerome's enormous erudition is exhibited on every page of his writings. He quotes frequently from classical authors, as well as from the Bible and other Christian writers. In addition, Jerome, with his highly developed powers of observation, makes many suggestive and original contributions to the understanding of the biblical text.

The writings of Jerome are of lasting value to Christians today because they offer a splendid example of the state of biblical interpretation in the West in the fourth century, because they give us an interesting insight into relations between Christians and Jews in the generations after Christianity became the religion of the state, and also because they paint for us, in vivid colours, a picture of the 'irascible monk' who devoted his life to the study of the sacred scriptures – in his own words: 'What other life can there be without the knowledge of the scriptures, for through these Christ himself, who is the life of the faithful, becomes known' (*Epistle* 30.7).

NOTES

- 1 On Jerome's use of classical authors, see Hagendahl (1974).
- 2 For fuller information on Jerome's education, see Kelly: (1975: 10–17).
- 3 On this, see Kelly (1975: 104–23); *Apology* 3.22; *Epistle* 108: 7–14.
- 4 *Epistle* 22 is a long treatise on the virtues of virginity, and the rules by which virgins should organize their daily lives.
- 5 *Ep.* 22.30; *Ep.* 5.2. On Jerome's knowledge of textual critical methods, see Brown (1993: 21–54).
- 6 Hort (1881: 81–2); Metzger (1963: 121–41); for versions of the Old Latin texts, see Metzger (1977: 321–2).

- 7 *Ep.* 129.3. On Jerome and the canon, see Howarth (1908–12).
8 *Comm. Dan.* 2:45. See Braverman (1978).
9 *Commentary on Ephesians* 5:18. See Grützmacher (1901: 40).
10 On these, see Braverman (1978), Penna (1950) and Jay (1985).

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AMBROSE



Ivor Davidson

Books profiling the leading figures of the early church tend to commit one of three crimes against Ambrose, bishop of Milan from 374 to 397. Very often they trivialize him, reducing his significance to that of supporting actor to the real protagonist of the later West, Augustine, whose creative genius and theological influence more or less totally eclipse the gifts of the one under whose spell he took his decisive steps towards Christianity in the first place. At best, Ambrose merits a bland paragraph or two outlining his impact upon Augustine, with a few predictable phrases explaining that he was in any case first and foremost a 'man of action', which (however true) is apparently intended to suggest that his intellectual abilities were slight. In other surveys, conversely, Ambrose is idolized, depicted as the stained-glass saint, other-worldly to the core, staunch champion of truth against error and sponsor of the rights of the church against every hubristic claim from secular authority. Icon of holiness and fearless defender of the faith, he appears to have scarcely a shortcoming at all. Third, worst of all, and remarkably often, Ambrose has been ignored altogether. The assumption apparently is that, *doctor* of the church or no, he holds little interest for those concerned to trace the big picture of Christianity's development. In far too many undergraduate church history syllabuses, and in the textbooks which they spawn, Ambrose scarcely merits a mention.

Each of these treatments is, wittingly or unwittingly, an injustice to an individual whose role in the formation of Christianity in the West was in fact both remarkable and complex. Ambrose deserves far better. Thankfully, there are signs that he is starting to receive it. Recent years have witnessed the publication of a number of sophisticated studies which seek to explore the man in his own context and to appreciate and critique his achievements in the light of the significant advances that have taken place in our understanding of the social and political world to which he belonged (especially McLynn 1994; Williams 1995; see also Marksches 1995: 84–212; Savon 1997). It is increasingly acknowledged (a) that Ambrose does merit a serious place in the history books, and (b) that he can only be accessed by reading between the narrow lines of a hagiography which has deftly but dangerously abstracted him from the realities of his time. We now know that his successes were far harder won than a good deal of earlier scholarship (e.g. de Labriolle 1928; von Campenhausen 1929; Palanque 1933; Homes Dudden 1935; Paredi 1964a) could or

would perceive; that Ambrose struggled against considerable opposition for much of his episcopal career, and often survived not just by dint of an unbending spiritual fidelity but also because of his ability to improvise in tight corners. Sanctity of character and steadfastness of doctrine are undoubtedly relevant categories in any summary of Ambrose's qualities, but they are not the only ones: words like 'brinkmanship', 'chutzpah', and 'effrontery' might also be deployed. The shrewdness of the political operator, the theatricality of the demagogue, and the evocative powers of the image-maker all had a part in his make-up and contributed to his ultimate achievement.

In the attempt to escape both patronizing dismissal and uncritical veneration, however, it is easy to fall prey to yet another danger. If we are not careful, we can create the impression that Ambrose's significance was little more than political, and that his political success in itself should be interpreted with a strong dose of cynicism (cf. Ramsey 1997: ix). The quest for the historical Ambrose, the attempt to strip away the accretions of a reverential portraiture which left the real man buried beneath the weight of his own glory, can equally readily fashion an individual after its own image: reconstructions of Ambrose the saint can, with little difficulty, be replaced by reconstructions of Ambrose the Machiavellian. Either way, the enigma,



Figure 47.1 Icon of St Ambrose. Copyright the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston.

the opacity of his actual motives, drives, and successes may remain untouched. Naturally, no sketch of Ambrose or of any other historical figure can in the end be anything other than a fictive attempt to capture its subject's personality; all that any canvas presents is an interpreted image, the individual as seen from one perspective or another. But the task for the sensitive historian must be to steer a *via media* between the equal and opposite extremes of seeing Ambrose only as an idol to be venerated or as a political phantom whose inner personality is obscure to the point of unreality.

Mindful of the pitfalls that lurk around our path, we shall in this sketch seek to explore Ambrose in a three-pronged approach. First, we shall look at his context, the kind of influences and perspectives which formed him, and the circumstances of his elevation to the episcopate. Second, we shall consider his quest to find his own role as a Christian leader, as one catapulted out of a civil career, with little or no spiritual or theological preparation, and charged with stabilizing an ecclesiastical situation fraught with factional tensions. This must involve us in an examination of developments which belong in the political realm, for although Ambrose was more than just a politician it was through his participation in many of the public events of his time that he carved out his distinctive niche as a churchman. Even in an age when politics and theology were exceptionally intertwined, Ambrose exercised an unparalleled influence upon political affairs. Finally, we shall try to evaluate the larger-scale results of that quest for self-definition as seen in the ecclesial community which Ambrose laboured to construct, both in Milan and further afield. In the end, his legacy is the specific character that he created for the public face of the Nicene faith on the stage of the western empire.

CONTEXT, FORMATION AND ELECTION

Ambrose's early life

Aurelius Ambrosius did not come from the top drawer of senatorial society, but he did hail from a privileged background. He was born at Trier, probably early in 339 (Palanque 1933: 480–2, 542–3), while his father served at the court of Constantine II, almost certainly as praetorian prefect of the Gauls, a high-level role which carried administrative responsibility for a vast area of Western Europe (Fischer 1984; Mazzarino 1989: 75–82). Ambrose senior died young, leaving his widow with three children: a girl, Marcellina, and two boys, Uranius Satyrus, and Ambrose junior. The family moved to Rome (probably returning to a property they already held), and the metropolis became the future bishop's adopted home. His late father's office did not afford him an automatic entrée into patrician society; he and his brother had to earn their place among an aristocratic set by cultivating the appropriate social *mores*. They passed through an education in 'the liberal arts', receiving the standard training in classical literature, rhetoric, and law which equipped young men for a career in the imperial civil service. Ambrose's schooling in the *quadriga* of Cicero, Virgil, Terence and Sallust remained with him for the rest of his days, profoundly influencing the style and texture of his speech and writing.

Their household established itself firmly in Roman Christian society. Marcellina took vows of chastity and received the veil from Pope Liberius in the new basilica of St Peter's, probably on the festival of Epiphany in 353. Marcellina adopted a life of domestic piety, residing in semi-seclusion with her family and a virginal companion, occupied in the kind of spiritual activities described so memorably by Jerome in his sketches of Lea, Paula and Marcella (*Epistles* 23, 108, 127) and above all in his famous *Epistle* 22 to Eustochium. Ambrose spent his youth in a household in which visits from clergymen were a regular event, and where talk of ecclesiastical affairs (such as news from the Council of Milan in 355) was part of regular conversation. Like plenty of other scions of Christian parentage, however, he and Satyrus remained unbaptized in childhood.

On completing their education, the brothers became advocates at the court of the praetorian prefect of Italy, Volcacius Rufinus, at Sirmium on the Danube. This choice of career path would not have been the fastest track to promotion for full-blooded aristocrats, who could count on their connections to open doors for them more directly, but it was a promising appointment for young men whose natural place was on the margins rather than at the core of the senatorial elite. As it turned out, both distinguished themselves as orators, and recognition was not long in coming. The fabulously wealthy Sextus Anicius Petronius Probus was appointed as Rufinus' successor in 368. Like many men of his type, Probus was a largely nominal Christian, but he had (particularly through his wife) significant connections with the church at Rome, and for the Ambrosii the associations were fortuitous. Ambrose soon became an assessor in Probus' *consiliarium*; then, in c. 372/3, he was raised to the rank of *consularis* and made governor of Aemilia-Liguria (Satyrus evidently received parallel favours, though the location of his governorship is unknown). This was a prestigious post which carried the title of *clarissimus* and brought jurisdiction – a responsibility for enforcing law and order, administering justice, and collecting taxes – over a considerable tract of north-west Italy. His headquarters were in Milan, which since the beginning of the century had steadily emerged as the principal urban centre in the western empire, now far more important in political terms than the mother-city, Rome.

The see of Milan had been occupied since 355 by Auxentius, a homoian Arian, or subscriber to the position that Christ the Son was not, as the Council of Nicaea had said, 'of the same substance' (*homoousios*) with God the Father, but 'like' (*homoios*) him (Hanson 1988: 557–97). A Cappadocian by birth, Auxentius had been appointed following the deposition of a pro-Nicene bishop, Dionysius, and he had survived more than one attempt from Nicene dissidents to remove him from office, including some serious broadsides from combatants as able as Hilary of Poitiers and Eusebius of Vercelli (Williams 1995: 38–68). He was a popular preacher, well-read in contemporary Greek theology, and a skilful player of church politics. He presided in an immense basilica, seating up to 3,000, the magnificence of which could hardly have failed to impress his parishioners.

Most importantly of all, Auxentius enjoyed the support of Valentinian I (emperor 364–75). A devout Christian, Valentinian aspired to religious neutrality, but while he resided in Milan in 364–5 he had issued an edict calling upon the city to rally behind the man who was after all its official bishop, and he had banished Hilary for

protesting that Auxentius' heretical views debarred him from such support. The homoians constituted a clear majority within the Milanese church; the Nicenes could only observe and disapprove of Auxentius' hegemony from without, maintaining a separatist identity by meeting in private houses or by congregating at outdoor conventicles, typically held around the cemetery areas outside the city where their forebears of similar doctrinal sympathies were buried.

The appointment of Ambrose as bishop of Milan

In the autumn of 374 Auxentius died, and the city was thrown into turmoil. The pro-Nicenes demanded a say in the appointment of a successor, and infiltrated an official gathering of homoian clergy and people in Auxentius' basilica to press their case. There is no evidence that the dispute had turned violent, but Ambrose chose to intervene, arriving at the cathedral in person to deliver a stern official's speech on the necessity of keeping the peace. On the face of things, his motives were formal and juridical, an attempt to defuse a dangerous situation and forestall public disorder. In reality, he was seen to be endorsing the legitimacy of the Nicenes' effort to disrupt an official ceremony being held for the purposes of acclaiming a new, and inevitably homoian, candidate. As a son of the Roman church, and by now a catechumen, Ambrose's sympathies undoubtedly lay with the Nicene camp, but he could hardly have anticipated the outcome of his actions. According to Paulinus, his secretary-biographer, all of a sudden, in the midst of the uproar a child's voice was heard to cry, '*Ambrosius episcopus!*' ('Ambrose for bishop!'). At this sound, the story goes, the whole mood of the gathering changed: Arians and Catholics forgot their differences and united in a plea for their *consularis*, truly a wild-card candidate, to become bishop himself (Paulinus, *Vita Ambrosii* 6).

But Ambrose, by his actions seeking to distance himself from the unexpected outcome of the meeting (Paulinus, *Vita Ambros.* 6–9; Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.11; Duval 1976), immediately left the church and resumed his administrative duties, deliberately ignoring the clamour for his election. He returned to his tribunal and, contrary to his usual practice (or so it is said – implausibly), passed a sentence of public torture on a number of people, in a bid to compromise his image as a just and humane adjudicator. His supporters, however, having followed him from the basilica, cried out that, as far as they were concerned, his sin could fall upon their heads; it made no difference to their wish that he be bishop. Ambrose had now received public acclamation to bolster the attestation already afforded him at the church gathering.

Retreating to his own home, he resorted to some more desperate expedients, this time entering into direct negotiation with his crowd of pursuers. First, he professed that he wished to devote himself to the life of a philosopher. Judging by the later evidence of his reading in philosophical texts, this may have been a genuine plea, but it too failed. Next he tried once more to disqualify himself morally by inviting prostitutes under his roof, but this elicited the same response as his previous attempt to compromise himself: 'Your sin be upon us.' Finally, he resolved to flee Milan. He left the city by night, destined for Pavia, but was discovered the next morning at the Porta Romana, the main triumphal route into Milan. From there he was escorted

back into the city. It is improbable that the governor did not know which road to take; Ambrose appears to have deliberately staged the spectacle of a triumphal return, simultaneously frustrated in his attempt to escape yet buoyed up by a clear display of public support. Nevertheless, he still resisted ordination. An appeal was sent to Valentinian, but the accompanying report of Ambrose's attempts to escape was probably intercepted by the prefect Petronius Probus himself, who, as Ambrose's patron, had his own interests in engineering the right outcome. By the time the plea reached the emperor, it doubtless seemed a clear-cut case of sanctioning a candidate for whom there was unanimous popular approval. There is nothing to support the once-standard idea that Ambrose's election was an example of ordination purely by public acclamation (Gryson 1980: 269–73), but it is easy to imagine Valentinian's readiness to rubber-stamp the appointment of an able administrator whose candidacy was presented to him, however tendentiously, as a potential cure for Milan's doctrinal divisions. Meantime, Ambrose sought to flee once more, going into hiding at the estate of Leontius, one of his aristocratic friends. His aim was probably to ensure that if he was to be appointed bishop it would be with the express endorsement of the emperor, and not simply as the partisan choice of the pro-Nicenes. On the arrival of the appropriate response from Valentinian, the *vicarius*, Probus' deputy in Milan and Ambrose's immediate superior, issued an edict threatening severe punishment for anyone found harbouring the fugitive governor, and Leontius wasted no time in handing him over. In the end, we are told, Ambrose gave in, realizing that he could no longer resist the destiny that providence had in store for him (Paulinus, *Vita Ambros.* 9).

To modern eyes, the whole process appears bizarre. Ambrose had no theological training for a clerical role, and had not even been baptized. There is little reason to doubt his reluctance to accept the future being thrust upon him. It was common in the late Roman world for those elected to high public office formally to decline preferment, pleading unworthiness and inability, and the same convention became widespread in church life. Ambrose's refusal, though, must have been genuine enough. A talented young administrator with influential connections, security of tenure, and healthy prospects, he had little reason to desire the invidious task of holding together a community riven by conflicting tribal loyalties. However devout his background in Rome, he must scarcely have considered it likely that this could be his calling.

Nevertheless, his flair for stage-managing events was obvious in his handling of the circumstances in which he found himself. The episodes narrated by Paulinus are not hagiographical embellishments, designed merely to bolster an image of Ambrose's self-effacement. Rather, they reveal the earliest indications that the new bishop had a keen sense of the importance of public gestures (McLynn 1994: 44–52). Ambrose had been faced with a situation which must have surprised him and a prospect which he quickly realized he could not in the end escape. He turned it into a series of steps which ensured that he established his inherently shaky credentials on the best footing possible. First, he insisted upon receiving baptism only at the hands of a Catholic bishop. This was a clear gesture to the Nicenes, for whom baptism by any other brand of cleric would have been invalid. At the same time, he made sure that he was seen to identify with a clerical body that was firmly homoian. After

baptism on Sunday, 1 December 374, he was ceremonially passed through each of the clerical grades, from doorkeeper to presbyter, in the course of one week, before being consecrated the following Sunday, 7 December (for a defence of the traditional date, see Faller 1942). This strategy was not a formal satisfaction of the canonical rule that a novice ought not to be elevated to the episcopate overnight (*pace* Gryson 1968: 225, n. 18; Williams 1995: 114–15, n. 48), nor is the account of it an apologetic fabrication by Paulinus (*pace* Fischer 1970; cf. Ramsey 1997: 20–1); rather, it provided a deliberate build-up to the finale of Ambrose's consecration. It successively associated him with each of the ranks in his church, and pre-empted a lengthy examination of his qualifications prior to the formal nomination ceremony on 7 December (McLynn 1994: 51).

As part of the final display, he publicly handed over his gold and silver to the church and to the poor (Paulinus, *Vita Ambros.* 38). This was no naive relinquishing of all his wealth, for the family estates, centred particularly in Africa (plus, it seems, some lands in Sicily), remained in his control, and his sister's needs at Rome were well provided for by the donation of a regular income from the property. It was designed, rather, to signal his new role as civic benefactor and patron of those in need. What must have happened in reality was that a proportion of the family assets were invested in Milan in order to help finance Ambrose's future strategy for managing his diocese.

Ambrose's qualifications and preparation for the episcopacy

Ambrose brought to the episcopate a specific complex of social, intellectual, and practical perspectives. Thanks to natural talent, hard work, and some assiduous networking, he had managed by his early thirties to attain high office in an imperial system which could well have passed over men of his background in favour of those whose *Romanitas* was of more venerable standing.

He had been shaped by the kind of opinions, pretensions and prejudices which typify those who have worked their way to a position of influence and power rather than enjoyed it by direct birthright. He remained profoundly affected by a concern for what 'men of the first rank' would think, for the sort of standards of public behaviour deemed appropriate for gentlemen, and the need to preserve a proper assurance and *gravitas* in social interaction – all of which are expected features in a culture where honour was a central value (see Chapter 1 of this volume). Traditional aristocratic assumptions about race, class, and social dignity are never far beneath the surface of his moralizing, despite all his altruistic language.

Ambrose also possessed a mind steeped in the literature and mythology of the classical world. Acutely conscious of his lack of preparation for his new role and the sudden obligation that it brought to teach and learn at the same time (*De officiis* 1.1–4; *De virginibus* 1.1–4; 2.1–5), he had to learn to apply his gifts to mastering a whole new field. His greatest asset in this area was that he had been trained to read Greek fluently. This skill proved invaluable as he set out to educate himself in the complexities of contemporary Christological discourse and the conventions of how to exegete biblical texts. He set himself a rigorous programme of reading in Philo, Origen, Basil, Didymus, Athanasius, and others, rapidly assimilating the Alexandrians'

techniques of allegory and typology and learning to imitate standard moralizing expositions of biblical exemplars. Besides these authorities, he also studied Platonist texts, familiarizing himself with a philosophical literature which was popular among Milan's intelligentsia. Within a few years, his sermons would evince vestiges from Apuleius, Porphyry, and Plotinus, and his spirituality would be configured around the theme of a spiritual ascent towards wisdom – albeit conceptualized in new guise as a journey initiated in the waters of baptism and climaxing in an eschatological union with the God of Jesus Christ (Courcelle 1968: 93–138). Habitually, it seems, Ambrose made sure that his study was *visible* to his people: Augustine tells of how the Milanese would watch their bishop as he pored in silence over his books in whatever precious intervals he could snatch from an administrative and pastoral workload which must from the start have been very heavy (*Confessions* 6.3.3).

In addition, Ambrose had proved himself to be an accomplished rhetorician: his abilities in this field had helped to win him early distinction as an advocate at Sirmium. He would learn to harness these gifts to his new knowledge of theology, and his powerful and learned pulpit performances would soon mark him out as one of the most effective preachers of the patristic age, revered for the eloquent charm of his style (Augustine, *Conf.* 5.13.23). Ambrose played a large part in Augustine's conversion, so that it was by Ambrose that Augustine was eventually baptized, in 387 CE.

He had also acquired invaluable experience as an administrator and adjudicator. In an age when bishops, particularly in metropolitan sees like Milan, had become linchpins in the system of imperial bureaucracy (Hobbs and Wuellner 1980), he would require all of his organizational skills and all of his flair for negotiation and bargaining. Ambrose would find himself not only in charge of considerable financial and material assets, and responsible not just for (often fractious) human resources both in his own city and across North Italy, but would also become a hearer of civil disputes (the onerous work of the *audientia episcopalis*), a vital go-between and sponsor of diverse interests and causes at an imperial court, and a mediator and ambassador on political business. He always looked back on his life as a provincial governor in negative terms (*De paenitentia* 2.67, 72–3; *Off.* 1.4; cf. *Epistle extra collectionem* 14[63].65; Lenox-Conyngham 1982a), but without the training and expertise he had developed in his former career it is highly unlikely that he would have become the kind of episcopal leader that he proved to be.

DEVISING AN EPISCOPAL ROLE

The achievements of preaching, pastoring and leading, however, lay somewhat down the track: first, Ambrose had to work out a basic *modus operandi*. He had inherited a clerical body which remained dominated by homoian officials, and it was not practicable for him to make sweeping changes in his staff. His congregation, too, was predominantly loyal to the memory of Auxentius. He possessed neither the knowledge nor the experience necessary to take on those with whom he disagreed. Prudently, he chose to avoid confrontation, and concentrated on building up his profile



Figure 47.2 ‘The Saint [i.e. Augustine] baptized by Ambrose’. Painting by Niccolò di Pietro (fl. Venice 1394–1430) in the Vatican. Copyright the Pontifical Monuments, Museums and Galleries, the Vatican.

as bishop of the whole see, rather than playing directly to a pro-Nicene constituency. There is possible evidence that he sought the help of Basil of Caesarea to return to Milan the bones of Auxentius’ Nicene predecessor, Dionysius, who had died in exile in Armenia, but it is uncertain whether the information (Basil, *Ep.* 197.2) is authentic: Ambrose may or may not have been able to venture such a gesture. What he did do was show favour to at least one notable former Catholic dissident, the venerable presbyter Simplicianus, who returned from Rome to become his baptismal instructor, and perhaps continued to act as a theological mentor beyond the initiation

process (at an advanced age, Simplicianus would one day be nominated by his pupil as his successor in the see).

Ambrose's earliest attentions were devoted to the acquisition of theological knowledge, and he waited more than two years before he published his first written work. When it came, its subject was significant: *De virginibus*. The theme neatly avoided the doctrinal tensions in his church, and gave Ambrose an opportunity to establish a distinctive didactic voice of his own. He speaks as the brother of a consecrated virgin (the work is dedicated to Marcellina), and the son of a pious widow. His family associations with female asceticism are presented as implicitly qualifying him to give instruction on this subject at least, however unprepared he still is for a general teaching role. He draws particularly upon Athanasius and Cyprian, though the debts are barely signalled (Duval 1974). The Italian churches already had plenty of women consecrated to a life of domestic asceticism, but Ambrose preached a new variant on the theme. He called upon the young women of Milan to devote themselves to Christ and his church as a public dedication of their desire to escape the game of being used as financial pawns in marriages arranged by wealthy parents. In a bid to persuade their families to encourage such commitment, he argued that the presence of a consecrated virgin in a household would bring merit to cover the family's sins (*Virg.* 1.32). This kind of strategy provoked some resentment, for the bishop was interfering in the private affairs of the family; but it also won results (Riggi 1980; Brown 1988: 341–65; Savon 1989). Ambrose was able to stage impressive processions of young candidates coming forward in large numbers to receive the veil, some of them from as far afield as North Africa. The spectacle of these parades can only have boosted the fledgling bishop's prestige in the eyes of his public.

Preoccupation with outward form characterized other moves as well. Encountering a cleric who happened to walk in a fashion that displeased him, Ambrose set about dealing with him: the man was summoned before the bishop's tribunal, whereupon he promptly deserted the clergy rather than face the ire of his superior (*Off.* 1.72). The concern for correctness of gait nicely illustrates Ambrose's concern to ensure standards of public behaviour which would commend the church to the eyes of discerning onlookers; he could not institute a wholesale restaffing schedule, but he could make a few changes indirectly which would improve the appearance of his clerical body by raising its proficiency in the semiotics of classical good conduct. He himself adopted a lifestyle which combined these polite manners with a self-conscious austerity, devoting himself not only to study and prayer but also to frugality of dress and diet, including the observance of regular fasts (Paulinus, *Vita Ambros.* 38, speaks of his body being wasted by 'daily fasts'), all designed to demonstrate his consecration to asceticism (Augustine thought his chastity his one obvious hardship: *Conf.* 6.3.3).

Most strikingly of all in terms of public display, he set about a major church-building programme. In time, it would transform the religious landscape of Milan, as the city's suburbs came to be dominated by a series of towering edifices epitomizing the style of Ambrose's regime (see pp. 1198–9). Most of the construction took place in the 380s, but there is evidence that the work had begun as early as the late 370s (*De excessu fratris* 1.20). There are signs, too, that the homoian majority

soon came to see the scheme for what it was: an audacious policy of imposing Ambrose's presence, and with it his increasingly open doctrinal alignment, upon the city and its hinterland. Some of the funds for the projects came from the private moneys which Ambrose had invested in the church; but not all. In order to ransom prisoners of war caught up in the Gothic ravages after the Roman wipe-out at the battle of Adrianople in 378 (Burns 1974), Ambrose opted to melt down and sell church plate to provide extra financial resources (*Off.* 2.70–5, 136–43). In itself, this might not have been especially problematic: there were reasonable precedents for such measures. In this case, however, Ambrose evidently made sure that the chalices in question were ones which had been donated to the church by homoian benefactors. He also seems to have diverted some of the proceeds from the sale of the plate to boost his building-fund, on the grounds that the cemetery basilicas being constructed were providing burial plots for needy Christians. In short, he appears to have been practising opportunism of a conspicuous kind – clearing his attic of assets which to him were tainted by association, while furthering his scheme to extend the physical presence of his church, all in the name of public sacrifice in the interests of a good cause (Brown 1992: 96).

At the time of his consecration, Ambrose's brother Satyrus had abandoned his career in order to devote his life to assisting with the administration of the see, renouncing all his own rights to marry or to make a will – a huge sacrifice. Satyrus undertook the supervision of the family estates, with a view to maximizing the income accrued by the Milanese church. He had, it appears, always been of delicate constitution, and on a return trip from Africa in the late summer of 378 he fell ill and died. His death was undoubtedly a major blow to Ambrose. The brothers had always been close, and their working lives had been intertwined to an unusual degree. But Ambrose did not miss the opportunity to define Satyrus' importance to the Milanese community, and by implication to signal his own significance as civic leader as well. His funeral sermon offered a highly wrought lament, sketching Satyrus' character throughout with reference to the supporting role he played to the bishop. The personal grief is clearly intense, but the formal conventions of the classical *consolatio* genre also shine through unmistakably (Duval 1977; Savon 1980). However acute his loss, it provided scope for him to impress his authority upon his people through the art of rhetorical performance (Biermann 1995).

All the while, Ambrose faced increasingly serious hostility within his community. His footsteps were dogged in particular by the presence of one Iulianus Valens, a homoian bishop who (presumably because of the barbarian invasions) had fled to Milan from his native Pettau in Noricum. Valens established a rival community in direct opposition to Ambrose. In addition, the anti-pope Ursinus seems to have stirred up some hard-line Nicenes to protest against what they perceived to be the compromising pragmatism of Ambrose's refusal to reform the overall structure of Auxentius' clergy. Ursinus himself was not a homoian (he was primarily interested in making life difficult for his real *bête noire*, Damasus), but Ambrose pictures Valens and him in an unholy alliance, for his activities lent added weight to the cause of the Arian opposition (*Ep. extra coll.* 5[11].3). Although the strength of these hostile forces continues to be underestimated by one or two scholars (e.g. Kaufman 1997), it was in fact considerable. Dissident household meetings seem to

have been held, with distinct liturgies and apparent plots against Ambrose. Ursinus was exiled to Cologne in 375/6, but this was probably in punishment for the behaviour of his supporters at Rome rather than as a consequence of the trouble he had caused in Milan; evidently there was no official sanction of his activities there. Ambrose made matters considerably worse for himself with the homoians by intervening in a synod in his former base of Sirmium, more than five hundred miles away, to ensure the election of a Nicene candidate as bishop in late 377 or early 378. This highly questionable involvement in the ecclesiastical affairs of a territory quite outside of his jurisdiction (which implied that Ambrose was prepared to take a heavier hand outside Milan than he was yet in a position to do on his own patch) provoked a furious protest locally in Illyricum, where the homoian community were strongly entrenched.

Most ominously of all, it incurred the wrath of the strongly pro-Arian Justina, mother of another son of Valentinian I, the young man who would become Valentinian II; her influence over the church at Sirmium was considerable. By forcing the result, Ambrose had directly insulted Justina. It would only be a matter of time before she sought her revenge, in collusion with the homoians of Milan.

Valentinian I died in 375, having arranged his succession so that his brother Valens would rule in the East and his teenage son Gratian in the West. When Valentinian's half-brother, the young Gratian, arrived in Sirmium after the disastrous defeat by the Goths at Adrianople in 378, where Valens himself was killed, it appears that he was met with warnings from the local homoian clergy that Ambrose's theology deserved to be investigated more closely. Probably they feared that his coup in the recent election would lead to further cross-border activities. Gratian was a devout youth, but he clearly lacked the theological knowledge to decide for himself. He opted to request from Ambrose a statement of his faith (Nautin 1974). Ambrose did not respond at once, perhaps because he knew that Gratian was due to visit Milan soon afterwards on his return to Gaul. When they subsequently met, in the summer of 379, Ambrose managed to impress the emperor and his entourage sufficiently to prevail upon Gratian to silence the homoians (*Ep. extra coll.* 12[1].2). Evidently the pressure upon Ambrose from these opponents was serious: in a number of references stemming from this period he warns of the dangers of false prophets leading the faithful astray or, fox-like, stealing sheep from the true fold (e.g. *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* 7.28–31, 44–53). When Gratian returned to Milan in the spring of the following year, he was presented with the initial stages in Ambrose's first public manifesto against Arianism, the opening two books of his *De fide* (Williams 1995: 128–53).

Ambrose's argument amounted to a full-scale attack on the theology of the homoians. With remarkable boldness, it is presented not as a defence of the bishop's personal beliefs but as a specially commissioned articulation of a doctrinal position already espoused by the emperor. Ambrose does everything in his power to dissuade Gratian from becoming attracted to homoian ideas while on his forthcoming campaign against the Goths, but he poses not as an apologist but as a spiritual spokesman. As the first serious evidence of his reading in Greek authorities, the work amounts at one level to a pretty dismal piece of intellectual endeavour (Hanson 1988: 669–75). Ambrose refuses to differentiate between the various strands of

Arianism. The homoians are lumped in with those of far more extreme beliefs, such as Aetius and Eunomius, who denied any similarity at all between God the Father and God the Son (Kopecek 1979). At another level, however, the text carries a poignant political message which gives an important clue to the bishop's ideological strategy. The Gothic triumph at Adrianople and the ensuing ravages of the Danubian provinces are depicted in the last paragraphs (*Fid.* 2.136–43) as a divine judgement on Arian strongholds; fidelity to the true faith, conversely, would guarantee a resounding Roman victory this time around. Ambrose was sounding a note that would become a familiar refrain: theological orthodoxy and the security of the empire are all of a piece (Palanque 1933: 325–35; Meslin 1964; Sordi 1988; Inglebert 1996: 297–309).

On his return to Illyricum, Gratian showed the work to Palladius of Ratiaria, the most senior and the ablest of the local bishops (Meslin 1967: 111–34). Palladius issued a sharp rejoinder, refuting Ambrose's misrepresentation of the homoian position and inviting him to engage in a direct debate (Palladius, *Apology* 81–7; McLynn 1991). Palladius was aware that Gratian had decided to convene a general council at Aquileia the following year, intended to resolve the differences between the Nicene and homoian parties, and on the basis of the shoddy logic evidenced in *De fide* 1–2 he must have been confident of his own chances of victory in an open encounter with Ambrose. Probably at his encouragement, Gratian requested further clarification from Ambrose, who opted to wait until the emperor had left Illyricum and was safely back at Trier, far from Palladius' influence, before he replied. He promised to fulfil the emperor's request, and once again deliberately turned around Gratian's plea for further information to make it sound as if the emperor's doctrine was confirmedly in line with his own (*Ep. extra coll.* 12[1]). He rushed off a further three books to *De fide* and followed these up with another three *De Spiritu Sancto*, the first treatise on the Holy Spirit in the West. Once again, the theological quality of the arguments is unimpressive. Notably, Ambrose declines to engage directly with Palladius' criticisms of his earlier work.

Throughout this time, Ambrose's position in Milan remained precarious. One illustration of this can be glimpsed in his reference in *De Spiritu Sancto* 1 to a (presumably recent) attempt to sequester a basilica in Milan in the name of the emperor (*Spir.* 1.19–21). The episode may well have been orchestrated by Justina, who had arrived in the city at some point after Adrianople. If so, it was a clear act of revenge for Ambrose's earlier humiliation of her at Sirmium, and a direct plea on behalf of the Milanese homoians (Williams 1994). Even if Justina was not directly behind it, her presence would undoubtedly have emboldened the homoians to press their case that worship in private was no longer good enough: they wanted churches of their own, where they could establish their presence publicly as an official opposition to Ambrose. In this particular case, the order was rescinded, perhaps when Gratian himself arrived in the city, but it reflects tensions which were all too real. The quest for territory was to prove an enduring concern in the years that followed (Maier 1994).

A reversal of Ambrose's fortunes, however, lay around the corner. The catalyst was Gratian's plan for a theological council. Late in 378, Gratian had issued an edict of toleration for the East, proclaiming the right of free worship for all religious groups

except the Manichaeans, the Photinians (who denied the pre-existence of Christ), and the Eunomians (*Codex Theodosianus* 16.5.5). However, shortly after his accession to the purple in January of 379, his new colleague Theodosius for his part had expressly proclaimed that 'all peoples' should follow the 'catholic' faith as articulated by Pope Damasus and Peter of Alexandria (*C.Th.* 16.1.2). There is considerable dispute surrounding this edict: was it a binding legal injunction, implicitly threatening imperial retribution for those who refused to comply, or was it simply a manifesto statement, setting out the new emperor's personal preferences – preferences shaped by minority Nicene pressure from the bishop of Theodosius' base at Thessalonica, Acholius? The latter is more likely; but at any rate the edict reflected Theodosius' concern to have his own say in the theological affairs of the East. In a bid to assert his authority over his junior colleague, Gratian announced that a general council would meet in 381 at Aquileia (a place convenient for both western and eastern delegates), but Theodosius was again not to be outdone. He summoned the bishop of Constantinople, Demophilus, and required him to subscribe to the Nicene faith; Demophilus refused, and opted to take his congregation into effective exile beyond the city walls. At the beginning of 381, Theodosius then issued a now-famous decree outlawing Arianism along with other sects (*C.Th.* 16.5.6), and in May of that year he convened his own assembly at Constantinople to elect a successor to Demophilus. It looked as if there was little point in Gratian's general council going ahead.

Ambrose, however, had other ideas. First, he saved Gratian the embarrassment of cancelling his council by insisting that the meeting should be held. But, crucially, he also persuaded the emperor that there was no need to call another large-scale gathering of eastern bishops so soon after Constantinople, for the dispute was, after all, a private one between himself and a few of his brethren from Illyricum. The upshot was that Aquileia proved to be a mere shadow of what Gratian had originally planned. Ambrose ensured that he was surrounded by a group of staunchly loyal supporters from North Italy and Gaul, while Palladius enjoyed far more limited support. In such a fiercely partisan environment, Ambrose orchestrated an overwhelming condemnation of Palladius, and of his prominent colleague, Secundianus, bishop of Singidunum. He swiftly followed it up with conciliar appeals, not only to Gratian but also to Theodosius himself, to act decisively against the Arians, first by legally enforcing the deposition of Palladius and Secundianus from their sees, and then by removing other menaces, such as the presence of Iulianus Valens in North Italy (*Epp. extra coll.* 4[10]–6[12]). A potentially awkward theological *contretemps* had been turned into a major political advantage. The Ambrose who had been struggling for so long had at last, by sheer opportunism and ruthlessness, succeeded in establishing a decisive Nicene bridgehead (Williams 1995: 154–84).

A matter of months before Aquileia, Gratian had officially transferred the western court from Trier to Milan. Ambrose found himself with unprecedented access to the machinery of government, and he exploited it to the full. He became an effective lobbyist not only for his own causes but also on behalf of the careers and aspirations of friends and contacts from the local area and beyond, and a giver of strategic hospitality to assorted officials and visiting dignitaries. Such activity called for a delicate balancing-act, for his own rhetoric insisted that the affairs of a corrupt

world were none of the church's concern (*Off.* 1.185), and that clerics were not to involve themselves in financial disputes (*Off.* 2.125; 3.59), or go around attending the power-dinners of the rich (*Off.* 1.86). Ambrose seemed to manage it, nevertheless, and in the process he reinforced his position as a key player in the political affairs of metropolitan society (Matthews 1975: 191–203).

Palladius, meanwhile, continued to protest against the treatment he had received at Aquileia, but to little avail. The details of his argument were apparently relayed to Ambrose, who happened to be publishing a sermon preached against two Arian courtiers who had criticized him (and had ominously managed to get themselves killed when they had failed to turn up to engage in a debate with him which they themselves had requested: Paulinus, *Vita Ambros.* 18); he was able to add a special section responding to Palladius (*De incarnatione* 79–116), in terms as shallow as before. Ambrose never did (Gottlieb 1973) enjoy the kind of ascendancy over Gratian that he duped his biographers into positing; incidents such as the controversy surrounding the Spanish ascetic, Priscillian of Avila, in which Ambrose's antipathy was drowned out by the agencies of Priscillian's supporter, the *magister officiorum* Macedonius (Chadwick 1976: 111–69), illustrate that. Nevertheless, in the latter days of a regime marked by indecisiveness, his influence over an essentially bored and impressionistic emperor was not inconsiderable. Gratian's weak grasp on power was met with the revolt of the British commander Maximus in 383, and death at the hands of one of Maximus' subordinates at Lyon; it was easy for Ambrose to portray him as an innocent victim of betrayal, fostering the assumption that Gratian had been under his wing all along, and that he had even died with the word 'Ambrose!' on his lips (*In Ps. 61 enarratio* 23–6; *De obitu Valentiniani consolatio* 78–81).

The political significance which Ambrose's agencies had come to assume also brought him a remarkable role in the checking of Maximus' rebellion. In order to gain time for the forces loyal to Valentinian who were gathering under the Frankish general, Bauto, the bishop went in person to Trier to appeal to Maximus for peace (*Epistle* 30[24]). Valentinian's supporters at Milan also proclaimed their independence from the coup, and urged Theodosius to muster forces against the usurper. In the end, no fighting actually took place, for Theodosius was finally persuaded to grant recognition to Maximus in return for the assurance that Valentinian's court was legitimate. But Ambrose, for his part, soon called in the debt for his diplomatic efforts. In 384, the urban prefect of Rome, the distinguished Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, formulated a legal petition seeking the restoration of the altar of Victory, a potent symbol of Rome's traditional religion, to the Senate-house, an incident related in detail by Bill Leadbetter in Chapter 10 of this volume. Ambrose led the attack on Symmachus. He guaranteed that the direst of consequences would ensue if the altar were restored, for this would symbolize a capitulation on the part of a Christian emperor to the old religious order. Reminding the court of its personal debt to him in his embassy to Trier, he warned Valentinian II, who was a teenage ruler of obvious vulnerability, that he would face the full opposition of his bishop if he chose to heed the pagans' case. Not surprisingly, the threats worked, and Symmachus' petition was rejected (Wytzes 1936; Klein 1972; Matthews 1975: 203–11).

Valentinian's relations with Ambrose were, however, destined to run anything but smoothly. In part, this was because of the influence of Justina, forever

characterized by the bishop as the Jezebel of the fourth century (or by Palanque 1933: 140 as the Catherine de Medici of Arianism). But it took more than the will of the queen-mother to make any onslaught (*infestatio*, as Ambrose would call it: *Off.* 1.72) against the bishop and his church a reality, particularly when the pursuit of such a vendetta would conceivably jeopardize political stability. Justina's machinations must have been only part of a tenuous but sinister alliance of hostile forces, in which the lead was taken by the homoians themselves. Chief among the latter was one Mercurinus Auxentius (Williams 1995: 202–10), a former protégé of Ulfila, the homoian 'apostle' to the Goths during the reign of Constantius II (Heather and Matthews 1991: 133–53). As bishop of Durostorum on the Lower Danube, Auxentius had been recognized by Palladius as a potential challenger to Ambrose, and after being removed from his see by Theodosius he found refuge in Milan, probably in the second half of 384. The ensuing period witnessed a revival of the homoians' prospects (Williams 1995: 185–217). Its climax, in the years 385–6, amounted to the most serious crisis of Ambrose's episcopate. Yet that crisis would also become the defining moment in his effort to assert his authority over his own territory once and for all, and to establish the Catholics as the definitive Christian community of Milan.

The pretext for battle was, once again, the vexed issue of space for worship. In the spring of 385, Ambrose was summoned to the imperial palace to be informed that the emperor wished to have a cathedral in which the court's worship could be led by homoian clergy: one of the bishop's basilicas, probably the Basilica Portiana, just outside the city-walls, was to be handed over forthwith (*Ep.* 75a [*C. Aux.*].29). This ultimatum was a direct rebuttal of Ambrose's earlier attempt to dominate Valentinian (though, by way of diplomacy, it was delivered courtesy of a special invitation to the bishop to attend the imperial consistory). Ambrose had, however, apparently informed his supporters that he had been called to the palace, and the meeting was interrupted by a crowd clamouring that the churches of God must remain inviolate. Fearing a public riot, the court had little option but to back down.

On 23 January of the following year, a law was issued (*C.Th.* 16.1.4) requiring freedom of worship for those who followed the (Arian) faith as specified at the councils of Rimini (359) and Constantinople (360). The language of the directive warned that there would be firm retaliation against any who resisted or claimed that such freedom was theirs alone; any such responses would be treated as treasonous. The law was a clear violation of the spirit of Theodosius' edict of 380, and in so far as it was designed to prevent another popular uprising against the right of homoians to worship in their own space it was equally clearly targeted at Ambrose. In all probability, it was framed with the direct involvement of Auxentius, as Ambrose himself contended (*Ep.* 75a [*C. Aux.*].16, 22, 24). The issue now was not just about a private site for the liturgical use of the emperor and his retinue; this time there was an implicit validation of the entire homoian community which had existed in opposition to Ambrose from the start.

In late March, just prior to Easter, Ambrose was once again issued with a request for a church. Now it was no longer the Basilica Portiana, but the central Basilica Nova itself that was sought (the chronology and topography of the affair are both subject to considerable scholarly dispute: see in particular van Haeringen 1937;

largely followed by Lenox-Conygham 1982b; Gottlieb 1985; McLynn 1994: 158–219; cf. Nauroy 1988). This demand for the bishop to give up his own cathedral can hardly have been fully serious, but Ambrose was reminded of the sanctions destined to follow upon any violation of the January law. He replied that a bishop had no power to surrender a ‘temple of God’, and implicitly appealed to his people to back him in his resistance of any infringement upon their rights (*Ep.* 76[20].2). At a meeting in his church next day, proceedings were interrupted by the arrival of the praetorian prefect, who came with new orders. It was not the Basilica Nova that was being sought for the emperor’s use after all, it was said, but the Basilica Portiana. Ambrose’s congregation themselves shouted a firm refusal. On Palm Sunday, the bishop was celebrating worship in his church when news came that the Basilica Portiana was being decked with imperial banners, evidently in preparation for use by the emperor and his entourage. It was also reported that a group from his own congregation, going to occupy the church for themselves, had violently assaulted a homoian presbyter (probably a court chaplain). He managed to send some of his men to rescue the unfortunate priest, but it was clear that the situation had taken an unpleasant turn. A severe fine was imposed on the *corpus negotiatorum* from which the rioters had come, and a number of them were imprisoned. It now seemed entirely possible that the court would deploy force to evict the Catholics.

Nevertheless, emboldened by the persistence of his supporters, Ambrose refused to comply with a further demand to persuade them to give up the Basilica Portiana, arguing that he was bound by a higher obligation than any human law not to betray ‘divine’ property (*Ep.* 76[20].8); he could not, however, challenge the actual legality of the state’s claim in the circumstances. Troops were sent to blockade the church, and things threatened to turn nasty when a contingent of them also entered the Basilica Nova while Ambrose was conducting a service. In the event, the latter group, Nicene sympathizers themselves, were induced to desert. Strengthened by this, Ambrose proceeded to deliver a passionate sermon, urging his congregation to remain steadfast in the cause of truth, and asserting that the basilicas were not Caesar’s but God’s (*Ep.* 76[20].19). At the news that the imperial hangings had been removed from the Basilica Portiana, he dispatched some clergy to join the occupiers of the church. This was a tactical mistake: it now appeared incontrovertible that he was supporting the sedition of the people directly. The news that the imperial hangings had been damaged worsened matters further. Ambrose denied any involvement in the affray, but fearing that he might be arrested he opted to remain in his church with his congregation during the night of Wednesday of Holy Week. It was during this vigil that he made one of his most successful and ultimately enduring moves: he introduced his congregation to the eastern practice of antiphonal singing. The process fostered a sense of solidarity in tense circumstances, and provided a stunningly effective channel for popularizing the idioms of Nicene theology, for Ambrose’s followers were given not just psalms to sing, but hymns of his own composition. The faithful stood together and sang together while Satan’s forces – or the devotees of a lesser theology – prowled at the doors (cf. Augustine, *Conf.* 9.7.15). The ‘Ambrosian hymn’, typically eight stanzas of basic iambic dimeters, was to become a widely imitated form: brilliantly, yet almost by accident, Ambrose had devised a formula which would revolutionize western liturgical practice

(Fontaine 1992). Hilary of Poitiers before him had sought to develop the metrical hymn as a medium for doctrinal teaching in the West, but it took Ambrose's delicate poetic gift, the spell of his charisma, and the intensity of his followers' emotions in an hour of crisis to make congregational singing really catch on.

On Maundy Thursday, while the bishop addressed his people, news arrived that the emperor had ordered the withdrawal of the soldiers from the Basilica Portiana and the repayment of the fines imposed on the businessmen. But the affair was not entirely over. After Easter, Ambrose was summoned before the imperial consistory to engage in a debate with Auxentius, the outcome of which was to be decided by a panel of judges nominated by the contestants and chaired by the emperor himself. The bishop would be less confident, it was assumed, off his own ground. He declined to comply, and withdrew to his church in the company of his congregation. The arrival of troops outside provided him with the opportunity to create another (this time imaginary) siege environment. In reality, the government had presumably sent some soldiers merely to forestall further public disturbances, but the scenario allowed Ambrose to argue that he was in no position to come to the palace. Once again, the singing and liturgy went on day and night, this time for a number of days. A final summons was then issued: the bishop must either nominate his arbiters for the debate or else leave the city. Evidently his congregation feared that he might take the latter course, and he had to reassure them that he would face martyrdom rather than abandon his church. To the court's demands, he responded with a sermon against Auxentius (*Ep.* 75a [*C. Aux.*]), a brilliant appeal to his people's sense of outrage that a man of God should yield to the will of evil schemers. He deliberately conflates the January law with Valentinian's orders to engage in dialogue with Auxentius. In an official letter of reply to the emperor (*Ep.* 75[21]), he paints Auxentius as a dangerous upstart, not fit to debate with one such as himself. He contends that the January law would have to be rescinded in its entirety before any such debate could take place, for if Auxentius were to be defeated this would logically invalidate it. He would, he claimed, be most willing to come and discuss matters of the faith — only his clergy and congregation would not let him.

Faced with such skilful evasion, such obstinacy in the guise of reasonableness, Valentinian had few choices left, particularly since there were veiled threats from Maximus and renewed problems on the Danube frontier. Ambrose had gained the upper hand by a combination of audacity, legal posturing, and a fortuitous turn of political events. He wasted no time in pressing his advantage. In June of 386, construction was completed on a magnificent new cathedral, to be known as the Basilica Ambrosiana, where the bishop himself intended to be buried, in the Hortus Philippi west of the city-centre, close by the resting place of the martyr Victor and of his own brother Satyrus (Mirabella Roberti 1984: 120–4). At the dedication ceremony, Ambrose pledged that the building would be decorated appropriately if the remains of some martyrs could be discovered. Next day, he led his people to the memorial to the celebrated martyrs Nabor and Felix, and gave his clerics orders to start digging nearby. Not surprisingly, they soon discovered remains, which were claimed to be those of another two martyrs, Gervasius and Protasius, who were believed to have suffered under Nero; the names were attested by a 'demon' being exorcized from an elderly woman. Amidst great rejoicing from the bishop's sup-

porters, the skeletons were solemnly transported to the new church for re-interment; *en route*, even fleeting contact with the bones is said to have proved sufficient to heal all sorts of diseases among the attending crowds (Doignon 1956; Zangara 1981).

Ambrose's opponents are said to have made accusations that the whole thing was staged by the bishop (Paulinus, *Vita Ambros.* 15), and for all his protests about their impiety (*Ep.* 77[22].16–23) they were doubtless right. But whatever the identity of the relics, what mattered was the impact that the discovery and ceremonial transference of them had upon the volatile Milanese community. Ambrose had provided a spectacular distraction from the tensions of the previous weeks; he had also signalled that, even if his foes had him killed, they would not be able to remove what he stood for: a martyred bishop would be commemorated in noble company in a vast new shrine. His tactics presupposed the growing significance of the cult of the martyrs in the late fourth century, and its ability to evoke powerful passions in a people already stirred by religious fervour (Brown 1981: 36–7). It was not hard for him to connect the *inventio*, the demonic testimonies, and the miraculous healings with fidelity to a theological cause, and to foster the idea that here was reward for spiritual steadfastness (Dassmann 1975). In the end, hopelessly outstaged by the excitement the bishop had inspired, the court gave up in its pursuit of its cause. The January law may or may not have been formally repealed; either way, it was dropped in practice. Rather than risk a further outbreak of potentially more serious anarchy, and increasingly preoccupied elsewhere with the problem of Maximus, Valentinian was advised to abandon the campaign his mother had supported. There were various gestures of reconciliation: Ambrose, for his part, undertook another mission to Maximus at Trier, which in the event did little or nothing to help the cause of peace. Valentinian's regime was nevertheless left fatally wounded by its encounter with Ambrose's intransigence, and within a matter of months the emperor and his retinue were in flight from Maximus' invading forces.

Nothing served to define Ambrose's style so much as this struggle with the forces of Arianism. His victory was won only through his gift for creating the impression that he was always in control, most of all when it must have been anything but true, and for portraying the sense that God was on his side. That is not to denigrate his personal courage, for the possibility of suffering violence or even martyrdom was, at points in the crisis, real for him as well as for his supporters. But the whole episode revealed his ability to exploit mass emotion, and to use his own networks to achieve vital leverage in desperate circumstances. Much of his assurance, for example, only made sense if he had contacts able to supply him with information about developments in his enemies' ranks, and much of his ability to persuade others to support his cause depended on his knack of extracting all the compliance that episcopal *auctoritas* could muster. Ambrose knew how to manipulate crowds while remaining aloof from the uglier side of their actions; he could seem to be one with the sufferers while pleading his willingness to be reasonable with the authorities responsible for the peril to which they were exposed (MacMullen 1990).

Ambrose's initial relations with Theodosius, the swift victor over Maximus' forces in the summer of 388, were conditioned by his existing standing with Valentinian. While in retreat at Thessalonica, Valentinian had repudiated his past homoian allegiances, perhaps in the wake of his mother's death. Ambrose was happy to

welcome him back to Milan, and to glory in the triumph of orthodoxy in yet another military confrontation. Theodosius, who accompanied him home, had clear Nicene credentials, but Ambrose lacked the kind of diplomatic history with his inner circle that he had built up with Valentinian's. His strategy, instead, was to use the political profile he had already secured to impress Theodosius with the authoritative grandeur he saw as attaching to his episcopal role.

A famous incident illustrates his approach. At the end of 388 there occurred a riot in the city of Callinicum, on the Euphrates, in which a Christian mob, led by the local bishop, plundered and burned down a synagogue. Theodosius, consulted by regional officialdom, responded by ordering that the perpetrators be punished and the bishop made to bear the cost of rebuilding the synagogue in person. When Ambrose got wind of this, he reacted sternly, urging Theodosius to revoke his orders, on the grounds that no bishop could with a good conscience be responsible for the construction of a synagogue, a place of 'idolatry'. He even claimed that he himself had validated the Callinicum mob's activities (*Ep.* 74[40].8). Theodosius decided to rescind the fine, but Ambrose wanted more. He argued that the whole case should be dropped. His logic, set out in a skilfully crafted letter to the emperor (*Ep.* 74[40]), reflects some starkly anti-Semitic sentiment, from which even his least critical admirers have felt obliged to recoil (e.g. Homes Dudden 1935: II, 372–9; on these tendencies generally in this period, see Wilken 1983; Millar 1992). It also raised enduring questions about the legitimacy of violence in a religious cause. On the next occasion when he preached in the presence of Theodosius, Ambrose went further, and directly appealed for a pardon to be extended to the rioters. When the emperor and his party protested that, having commuted the original sentence, they still had every right to punish those who had defied law and order, Ambrose refused to continue with the service until he got his own way. Theodosius elected to give in. The situation is depicted by the bishop (*Ep. extra coll.* 1[41]) as a personal triumph, and it has traditionally been interpreted as a daring confrontation – a bold churchman reducing an emperor to a humiliating climb-down, an episcopal Nathan rebuking an imperial David (Paulinus, *Vita Ambros.* 23, influencing, e.g., Palanque 1933: 219). In fact, it is likelier that Theodosius recognized the political capital to be made out of a measured gesture of beneficence: by exercising clemency, he guaranteed himself the affection and gratitude of the Italian Nicenes, whom his advisers had been working hard to win over.

Another incident which reflects the same abilities on the part of Ambrose occurred in the summer of 390 in the city of Thessalonica and is described by Bill Leadbetter in Chapter 10 of this volume. A popular charioteer was arrested and put in prison for allegedly making sexual advances to one of the attendants of Botheric, the commander of the local garrison. The people rioted, and Botheric was killed, along with other officials. When news of this serious outrage reached Theodosius, extreme retaliation was ordered. It is improbable that Theodosius acted simply in anger, without serious consideration of the consequences; but however the decision was made, he endorsed a punitive plan that yielded nothing to clemency (McLynn 1994: 315–23). The garrison at Thessalonica was given orders to execute the faction responsible for the revolt. The details of the order may well have been misunderstood, or the troops were determined to wreak much severer vengeance than had

been mandated, for in the space of a few hours a considerable number of innocent residents of the city, possibly up to 7,000 in all (Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.17), were brutally massacred. The true perpetrators of the murder of Botheric may well have escaped. Although Theodosius, faced with public outrage on a large scale, attempted to distance himself from the atrocity, implying that it was an act of bloodlust by an army stationed far from his immediate control, he was obliged to bear ultimate responsibility. Ambrose saw to it that Theodosius did public penance for this massacre by threatening, in effect, excommunication if he did not.

Ambrose never did cement the kind of dominant relationship with Theodosius that many historians have imagined. His prevarication in dealing with Eugenius, Valentinian's successor in 392–3, reflected an enduring sense of uncertainty as to what would be politically expedient. Ambrose was caught between an initial attitude of warmth towards Arbogast's new Augustus and a desire to wait and see which way Theodosius himself would go. When Eugenius invaded Italy in the spring of 393, Ambrose opted to leave Milan (while away, he managed to preside over the exhumation of further martyr-relics at Bologna: *Exb. virg.* 1–10; Paulinus, *Vita Ambros.* 29), returning only when Eugenius' forces had vacated the city the following year. He himself presents this as a measured decision to rebuff one who, for all his Christian professions, had given in to demands from his pagan supporters for subsidies for their cults (*Ep. extra coll.* 10[57]; cf. Paulinus, *Vita Ambros.* 26.3); more probably, he anticipated the embarrassment of meeting Eugenius after finally opting to side with Theodosius against him. Theodosius' triumph was naturally greeted by Ambrose with rejoicing, and the emperor's death not long afterwards, in January 395, gave him the final opportunity to claim Theodosius as his own. The ebbs and flows which had marked their relations were speedily forgotten, and the bishop's eloquent funeral eulogy (*De obitu Theodosii oratio*) proclaimed Theodosius as model Christian ruler and patron of a Nicene faith that had now definitively captured the West (Duval 1977: 274–91). Ambrose was himself to die just over two years later, on 4 April 397, from an illness incurred after a trip to Pavia, before the imperial dream was shattered, when Stilicho, the Vandal general whom Theodosius had appointed regent over his sons Honorius and Arcadius, lost control, and Milan itself became a potential prey to the invading Goths. His political prominence in these last years, under a governor whose Christianity was nominal, had not been so great, and he had been spared the turmoil of the cataclysmic times which lay ahead.

Ambrose had served his episcopate as a remarkably political figure, in close proximity to a succession of emperors and their courts, over a critical period in the history of the later western empire. Against a disparate but powerful range of opponents (Cracco Ruggini 1974, who nevertheless overstates the degree to which they constituted an organized alliance), and in the face of often considerable tensions with the imperial powers, he had learned to develop a style which, for all its ambiguities, was outstandingly effective. Almost nothing about the process had been as straightforward as Ambrose had managed to make it seem; but manage he had. At once a kind of fusion of Old Testament prophet and judge and the epitome of the classical public man, he had skilfully succeeded in presenting himself as power-broker and spiritual mentor to the highest authorities, one capable of moving with assurance and impact at the ultimate levels of political influence, articulating a

message which combined intellectual conviction and social respectability. It was a *persona* designed to reflect an unswerving belief that his version of truth would inevitably prevail, and that a Christianized empire meant the sure triumph of the Nicene faith, not just over the impieties of every theological alternative but over the social and ethical structures of its cultural inheritance.

CREATING AN ECCLESIAL COMMUNITY

When Ambrose assumed office, the Nicene–Arian divisions were only part of the problems afflicting the church in North Italy. The region's bishoprics, each with its own traditions and practices, were spread across a considerable area; Milan, for all its political significance, still needed to evolve an ecclesial identity distinct from Rome's by weaving its independent customs into a tighter and more confident package. The smaller sees required their larger neighbour to provide them with a kind of symbolic leadership; Milan had to find a way of being both the chief mediator of Rome's authority and the figurehead for a proudly particular northern church. The obvious political instability of the 370s and 380s made the need for social cohesion within these communities all the greater. Ambrose was able to capitalize on a *Zeitgeist* which reflected both a sense of uncertainty and a growing perception of the need to consolidate the North Italian church within its own sphere.

His spirituality presupposed a dialectical tension between two worlds, the seen and the unseen, the literal and the spiritual, the temporal and the eternal (Seibel 1958). He carefully engendered what has aptly been described as a 'siege mentality', whereby the church, devoted to the service of Christ, the true 'emperor', was to be seen as surrounded by the evil forces of the *saeculum* (epitomized variously by Manichees, pagans, and Arians of every kind), whose constant determination, satanically inspired, was to bring about its downfall (Meslin 1967: 51, cited by Brown 1988: 347–8). He combined this rhetorical image of a spiritual warfare against the powers of darkness with a pragmatic exploitation of all the leverage that a Christianized imperial system could secure. His dream was for a church that would simultaneously dominate and transcend its social world. Catholic faith and Roman empire were bound together, but the church was to exercise a prophetic vocation to act as the critic and purifier of the residual corruption of the empire's ethos, for it had an eschatological destiny to surpass any merely human moral configurations. The sensualism, the self-absorption, and the material iniquities which characterized the unregenerate human condition were to be decried then remedied in the asceticism of devotion to Christ (Dassmann 1965). The social distinctions presupposed by the world were to be overridden: rich and poor, court officials and illiterate peasants, would come together; the emperor was to worship alongside the most vulnerable members of society. To enter this community by baptism was to leave behind the pollution of the world, and to become privy to the deep things of God, which only spiritual eyes could see. Sacramental initiation was a profoundly mystical process, a *disciplina arcani* hedged about by solemn warnings about privilege and responsibility, and presided over by a sacerdotal class who were to be seen as the guardians of

secret rites as awe-inspiring as those over which the Levites of old presided (Jacob 1990). Through the strictures of the system of public penance, the clerical hierarchy acted not only as gatekeepers but also as guarantors of in-house discipline. To be the *populus Dei* in Milan in the 380s was to be the spiritual offspring of patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, in direct continuity with the elect of every age who had been summoned into a life which ascended beyond the standards accepted by a godless world; it was to be destined, at last, for a reward that was heavenly (Hahn 1969; Toscani 1974).

To be effective, the religious mystery of this 'true philosophy' required to be presented in a way that conveyed a powerful sense of cultural assurance. Ambrose's intellectual message was one plank in that strategy. Doubtless a large proportion of his hearers never identified the allusions to Greek texts which he paraded in his sermons, or the evocations of classical literature which lurked in his narratives of biblical stories, when phrases from Virgil and Terence slipped out almost sub-consciously, or stereotyped characterizations of money-lenders, legacy-hunters, or greedy merchants crept into his generalized moral disquisitions on contemporary social evils (Vasey 1982). Reading the transcripts or reworked versions of these homilies today, his spontaneous, discursive articulations of scriptural texts often seem unappealing: they are not systematic expositions in any obvious sense. But the density of their style impressed those who first listened to them. When Ambrose preached (as he usually did) on the Old Testament narratives, the sheer range of his textual reference (which regularly included allusions to the Septuagint, his preferred version, and to variant readings gleaned from authorities such as Origen's *Hexapla*) and the intensity of his delivery seemed to convey authority and passion, and a mind soaked in the idioms of a scriptural spirituality (Nauroy 1985; Graumann 1994). To the cultivated critics of court society, and to judges like Augustine who understood very well what to look for in an orator, Ambrose came across as a pastor and teacher who knew what he was about. In any overall appraisal of his substance, Ambrose was not an original thinker. He did anticipate and shape some significant aspects of later western thinking on original sin (Homes Dudden 1935: II, 612–24), the transformation of the Eucharistic elements (Johanny 1968), the veneration of Mary (Neumann 1962), and the idea of a holy war (Swift 1970), but his theological ideas were on the whole derivative, and his grasp of many doctrinal nuances was frequently far poorer than his opponents'. This does not mean, however, that Ambrose was a lightweight. As it happens, modern scholarship has shown that his personal role in reshaping the ideas he imbibed from his exegetical sources was often quite significant (Lazzati 1960; Pizzolato 1965, 1978; Lucchesi 1977; Savon 1977; auf der Maur 1977). Ambrose was a creative synthesizer, driven by pragmatic concerns. Enemies like Jerome may have mocked him as a plagiarist (Paredi 1964b), but what mattered in the end was that Ambrose's intellectual showmanship worked for those whom he needed to sway most – the movers and shakers of his own city, and their social peers within a wider Italian radius (embracing Rome itself), who needed to be either convinced or reminded that the philosophy of the *saeculum* had been vanquished by a definitive revealed truth (Madec 1974; Lenox-Conygham 1993). By publishing redacted versions of his sermons as written treatises, he was able to drive the message home to as wide a literary public as possible.

Another vital element in Ambrose's mission was his programme to dominate the physical landscape of his city (Krautheimer 1983: 69–92; Mirabella Roberti 1984). At the very time when he was most under pressure to yield official space to his opponents, he was also most intent on extending the presence of his own community through the rapid construction of churches. Milan came to be encircled by a string of massive new buildings outside the city walls: the Basilica Ambrosiana (Sant' Ambrogio), dedicated with such ceremony in 386, the emblem of Ambrose's claim to an ineradicable entry in the religious history of his city; the strikingly impressive Basilica Apostolorum (San Nazaro), the first cruciform basilica to appear in the West, modelled, like a number of its eastern contemporaries, on Constantine's Apostoleion in Constantinople, and built strategically on the route taken into Milan by Theodosius, who seems to have donated relics of the evangelists to be housed inside the church; and the Basilica Virginum (San Simpliciano), a smaller cruciform building constructed to the north of the city. (A fourth church, the Basilica Salvatoris [San Donighi] is attributed to Ambrose by later tradition and marked on Krautheimer's plan of the city [Figure 47.3], but it is improbable that it is as old as the fourth century.) The new churches were designed to symbolize that the social triumph of the Nicene cultus was irreversible. They were consecrated using liturgical language which was deliberately anti-Arian, and their architectural and decorative elaborations were intended to placard the wealth and status of the Nicene community's benefactors. The ecclesiastical establishment had traditionally been

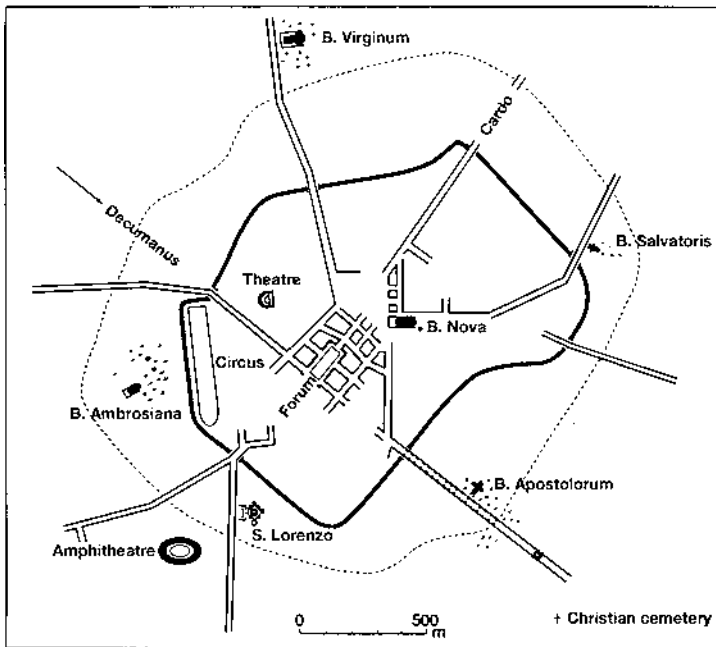


Figure 47.3 Milan c. 400, showing location of fourth-century churches. From Krautheimer (1983: 73), by permission of the University of California Press.

concentrated in the area around the central cathedral; now it had colonized suburbia.

The third element in Ambrose's master-plan was the reformation of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In his early years, as we saw, his options in this area were very limited; but by the second half of the 380s his retinue looked very different. Some of his clergy had perhaps been successfully converted to their leader's theological stance; a large proportion were very probably weeded out and replaced by younger men carefully selected for their malleability (it is also clear that there had been some attrition of supporters during the Arian crisis: cf. *Off.* 1.72). Ambrose's most famous literary legacy, penned in the late 380s, is his *De officiis*, a treatise on moral responsibilities based upon Cicero's famous text of the same name, and significantly influenced by his version of Stoic ethics (Testard 1984–92). As Cicero wrote for his son, Marcus, and for a politically ambitious class of young Roman gentlemen living amidst the débâcle of the Republic in 44 BCE, Ambrose writes for his spiritual 'sons', the clergy of Milan. His aim is not to build bridges between the gospel and secular philosophy, or to create a systematic parody of a celebrated classical exemplar, but to adapt the Ciceronian paradigms to a new, Christian context, and to show that the old account of duties has been superseded by a moral framework which goes much further (Davidson 1995). His anticipated readers are not only ecclesiastics; he also intends the work to be perused by non-Christians, who will be able to compare his exposition of biblical morality with the details of the Ciceronian text around which it is structured. For both classes of reader, his message is that a new elite has emerged, one that is concerned no longer with the service of the *saeculum* but with a nobler end, which it must realize by profounder means. To be in the service of God is to be called to a higher path of 'perfect duty', modelled on Christ's self-sacrifice and oriented towards conformity to his image. Many of the assumptions of the classical patterns of correct behaviour are still regarded as critical – clerics are to be paragons of 'seemliness', walking, talking, and conducting themselves in a way which reveals a true self-mastery, and thus impressing a watching world with their social finesse. Some aspects of the cardinal virtues, notably of mental fortitude and temperance, remain very close to the Roman Stoic ideals. But others are quite different. Prudence is no longer viewed simply as practical good sense: it is, in an ultimate sense, the fear and knowledge of God. Justice is not just about giving to each his or her own; it is also, supremely, about Christian charity, which has replaced civic euergetism as the prerogative of a new, spiritually commissioned officialdom (Becker 1994). The 'effeminacy' and uncouthness traditionally abhorred in the public figure no longer reflect mere ill-breeding; they now bespeak compromise with the defilements of the corrupt world of the flesh. The *athleta Christi* or the *Dei miles* is to be seen to be a conqueror over tendencies that are both aesthetically distasteful and repugnant to God; he is to be chaste, self-denying, altruistic, pure, heavenly minded, and conscious of his ultimate accountability to a divine judge. Virtue and expediency, rightly conceived, are the same thing precisely because each of them is directed towards and determined by the prospect of eschatological reward.

De officiis represents a literary dissemination of a vision which was also expressed through preaching, personal example, and letter-writing, and backed up locally by a strict code of discipline. Ambrose succeeded in surrounding himself with subordinates who followed the very norms which he himself had laboured to polish; his own

priestly ideal, a distinctive synthesis of images drawn from the Hebrew cultus, the classical tradition, and the Pastoral Epistles (Gryson 1968; Bonato 1987; Coppa 1992), was passed on. Evidently he had no shortage of clerical candidates: as a metropolitan see, regarded as a valuable springboard for ecclesiastical promotion, Milan attracted plenty of young men ready and willing to be schooled in the bishop's ways. From this mini-seminary environment, a number of his trainees went on to episcopal office elsewhere, sometimes directly (and controversially) through Ambrose's engineering. Through regular correspondence and personal contacts with these and other brethren whom he deemed worthy of direct encouragement and instruction, Ambrose built up a considerable network of loyal supporters throughout North Italy and beyond. By ensuring that these satellites looked to him as their leader and remained faithful to the standards he strove to inculcate, he saw to it that the next generation of leaders were equipped to reinforce the social dominance of their church as the new century dawned (Lizzi 1990). The *episcopi* of the future, having learned to style themselves in the same basic way as the patrons, guides, and regulators of their communities, would head up an ecclesial hierarchy fashioned after their mentor's example.

For Ambrose, in the end, the whole of life was about image, his own and his church's, and the one was intrinsically bound up with the other. That is not to cast doubt on his sincerity, or to suggest that everything about him was a façade. In an age increasingly prone to privatize beliefs and morals, we might even learn from his passionate concern to demonstrate the public validity of his Christian message, and to work out intellectual, social, and political routes by which to commend it to its critics. Ambrose lived in a time and culture uniquely susceptible to the potency of the particular image he laboured to present, and by styling his ministry as he did he proved to be the chief architect of Catholicism's victory in the fourth-century West. There are, at the same time, many areas in which few if any of us would wish to invoke his behaviour as a model. We may admire the dexterity with which he created his dream, without ignoring the dark realities of some of his methods. No doubt the tantalizing complexities of Ambrose's psychological make-up will remain to intrigue us. But if we can hold in our mind's eye both the outstanding achievements and the questionable tactics for which he was responsible, we may at least avoid some of the mistakes into which earlier historians have fallen. We may, in fact, have begun to glimpse the only Ambrose who ultimately matters.

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AUGUSTINE

Carol Harrison

North Africa, where Augustine¹ was born in 354 and where he was to spend almost half of his life as bishop of the large seaport of Hippo Regius (modern Anaba), lay at the heart of the Roman empire. The coastal region, which possessed the greatest concentration of towns – Hippo was second only to Carthage, the capital – contrasted sharply with the less Romanized, village, agrarian culture of the inland olive and wheat plains. These were, however, central to the Roman economy and provided Rome with at least two-thirds of its grain supply: Africa was known as the breadbasket of Italy.



Figure 48.1 Mosaic from Utica in North Africa depicting olive cultivation. Photo J. C. N. Coulston.

Augustine's birthplace was the small, traditionally Berber town of Thagaste (modern Souk Ahras) in the Eastern part of Numidia. His father, Patrick, belonged to that class of modest landowners who were permanently impoverished by the enormous tax burdens imposed by the emperor, which, as a town councillor (*decurion* or *curiale*) he was either obliged to collect from peasant tenants (*coloni*) or pay himself (see Chapter 1 of this volume). Patrick obviously entertained higher aspirations for his son and was aware that the best means to advance his prospects was to ensure that he obtained that universally recognized, exclusive and distinguishing marker of social prestige and office: a traditional Roman education. This began with the school of grammar in Thagaste where he would have learnt to read a text and study the disciplines of the liberal arts, and then, thanks to a wealthy patron, he went to the school of rhetoric, the art of public speaking, at Madura and Carthage.

The office of rhetor was the highest goal of Late Antique education; thus, in deciding to become a teacher of rhetoric Augustine entered an aristocracy, not of birth, but of educational formation.² He taught at Carthage (376–83) and Rome (383–4) and was eventually appointed to the municipal chair of rhetoric in Milan (384), the imperial capital. From here he could well have aspired to a provincial governorship and to senatorial rank. Instead, in 386, at the age of 32, he abandoned his career, broke off his arranged marriage, relinquished any future hope of financial security or worldly status, and converted to Christianity.

Why? Augustine's answer is to be found in his well-known *Confessions*. Here we can read his own account of his life (from infancy, childhood, school, adolescence . . .) and his intellectual journey in search of wisdom, the true philosophy. His autobiographical account of his conversion to Christianity in Books 1–9 is presented as a microcosm of the conversion of creation towards God in Books 11–13, where he comments upon Genesis 1–3. (Book 10 reflects upon his present life as a fallen human being in a fallen world, and therefore on how conversion is not so much the end, as the beginning of his search for God.)

The problem with the *Confessions* is that, like all autobiographies, it was written with the benefit of retrospective reflection and interpretation at least ten years after the events he recounts (397–401). They are therefore fundamentally anachronistic and frustrate any attempt to find out what really happened: Augustine had too many critics, too much to defend and justify, too much to teach and recommend to his readers, too much cultural 'baggage', for this. The *Confessions* must therefore be read on his terms.

CONVERSION OF THE MIND, HEART AND WILL

He would obviously like to portray himself as a rather dissolute youth: fighting for milk at his mother's breast, failing to learn Greek at school, stealing pears, enjoying adolescent sexual adventures, deceiving his despairing mother, unable to remain chaste – all this to demonstrate his own sinfulness and the operation of God's grace in bringing him willingly to embrace Christianity.

He also conveys a sense of intellectual earnestness: he read and understood Aristotle's *Ten Categories* at an early age, was tormented by the question of evil, and

at the age of 19 was fired by Cicero's *Exhortation to Philosophy* (a textbook he read while studying rhetoric) to seek for wisdom, the true philosophy. Turning to the Christian scriptures his cultured sensibilities found them quite rebarbative – they were 'unworthy to be compared to the majesty of Cicero'. Instead, he became a member of a dualistic, ascetic, gnostic-type religious sect, founded upon the teaching of the prophet Mani (born in Babylonia in 216 CE). For a time the Manichees³ seemed to offer Augustine everything for which he had been searching: they claimed to represent a true and purified form of Christianity and criticized precisely those aspects of it which Augustine too had found problematic (contradictory, seemingly immoral scriptures; an anthropomorphic conception of God; an emphasis on faith and authority). He found the communal nature of the sect, its extensive, lavishly illustrated scriptures and, above all, its attempt to distance itself from evil matter by extreme asceticism in its 'elect' deeply attractive, even though he himself felt unable to embrace celibacy and joined the lower rank of 'hearers'. At some stage during the nine years he remained in the sect disillusionment began to set in: their claim to possess truth was revealed as mere pseudo-science, their asceticism proved to be more a matter of words than of practice, their dualism raised more problems than it solved, and the much-acclaimed Manichee, Faustus, failed to answer any of these problems. On finally breaking with them Augustine despaired of ever finding the truth, and hints at a period of scepticism in the *Confessions*.

During this period Augustine moved from Rome to the imperial capital, Milan, to take up the municipal chair of rhetoric, secured for him through the influence of Manichaeans friends, and it was while he was in Milan that two decisive encounters occurred which completely transformed his thought. The first was with what he describes as 'some books of the Platonists, translated from Greek into Latin' (*Confessions* 7.9.13). It is unclear what exactly Augustine read; scholars generally conclude that it was probably some Latin translations of Plotinus' (204–70 CE) *Enneads* (he could not read Greek with any great facility) and maybe some translations of Plotinus' editor and disciple, Porphyry (232–300).⁴ Whatever the works were they revolutionized his thought, in particular, their insight that the true nature of reality was spiritual. Augustine was finally able to free himself from the prevailing materialism of the thinkers of his day, including the Manichees, to find a convincing alternative to anthropomorphic conceptions of God, finally to discover an answer to the problem of evil (as a privation of the good), and to understand himself as a spiritual being who might find truth in the God who is both the foundation of himself and who transcends him.

The second encounter was with Ambrose, bishop of Milan, whom Augustine heard preach. Part of Augustine's acquaintance with Neoplatonism no doubt came through his sermons, but what especially struck him at this time was Ambrose's allegorical, spiritual exegesis of scripture, which overcame all the objections which the Manichees' literal, rationalistic exegesis had posed.

In recounting these events in his *Confessions* Augustine obviously wishes to persuade his reader (and, of course, himself) of the rational, logical force of the religion he had embraced. In doing so he would have in mind his own critics, who doubted the genuineness of his conversion, and questioned, for example, whether he had really left Manichaeism behind, and also his intellectual peers, to whom Christianity

(and especially its scriptures) appeared somewhat illogical, absurd, crude and rather distasteful, and who criticized its credulity in putting faith in authority before reason.

The final dramatic moment of conversion is, however, not a scene of intellectual argument and proof but a highly emotional turning of his heart and will towards God. The *Confessions* are, in fact, one of the first works of antiquity to reveal a keen sense, and candid portrait of the writer's inner self; his emotions, affections, the intricate and confusing workings of his mind and the depths of his subconscious. This is reflected in their highly charged, vivid poetic language, in dialogue with God.

Describing his gradual ascent towards God in Neoplatonic terms in Book 10 Augustine concludes with the realization that in fact he had no need to seek for Him, since God had always been graciously present, calling to him, as seen in the almost rhapsodic twenty-seventh chapter:

Late have I loved you, Beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved you. Yes, you were inside me while I was outside myself. I sought you there and – in my deformity – rushed upon the lovely things of your creation. You were with me, but I was not with you. Holding me far from you were objects which would have had no existence if they did not exist in you. You called! You cried! You shattered my deafness. You glistened! You shone! You put my blindness to flight. You gave off your fragrance and I drew in breath, so now I breathe for you. I tasted you and now I hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am afire for your peace.

(Augustine, *The Confessions* 10.27; trans. Philip F. Esler)

In *Confessions* 8 he describes the actual moment of his conversion as inspired by a divinely graced reading of a passage from the Apostle Paul: hearing a voice chanting 'take up and read' he opened the copy of Paul's epistles which he had been reading in the garden of his lodgings at Milan and his eyes fell upon Rom. 13:13, 'Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences' (*Confessions* 8.12.29). Augustine's final conversion was one of his will, away from the temptations, distractions and allurements of the world to true celibacy (*continentia*) – a single-minded, single-hearted devotion to God.

Conversion from Christianity to Christianity

Perhaps most importantly (and most anachronistically?) he describes his search for truth against the ever-present backdrop of Christianity, as if he was never not a Christian but was merely seeking to reconcile himself to it: he had drunk it in with his mother Monica's milk; he had been dedicated to it as a child; when he read Cicero the only thing he found lacking was the name of Christ; the Manichees attracted him because they claimed to be true Christians (*integri Christiani*); the Sceptics he rejected because Christ was absent from their thought; the Platonists he measured against Christian thought and found wanting. Obviously this way of presenting his conversion again serves to demonstrate the insuperable operation of

God's grace, this time in a rather errant intellectual, but more to the point it passes judgement upon the philosophers and religious cults of Augustine's day and vindicates Christianity as the 'true philosophy' and 'true religion', with Christ as the 'one mediator' between God and man. Whereas the philosophers would proudly maintain that truth is accessible to reason or through the cult of the gods,⁵ Augustine affirms in the *Confessions* that it is only accessible through the revelation and mediatorship of Christ, and that it is only appropriated by humble faith, hope and love in him. Augustine often uses Rom. 1:19–23 to demonstrate the philosophers' insight into the truth, 'For what can be known about God is plain to them; because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made'. But the verses which follow demonstrate the philosophers' pride and guilt, because, although they thereby knew God, they 'did not give thanks to him as God, but became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.'

The doctrine of the fall

What was it that brought about this decisive break with his own past life and habits on the one hand, and with ancient philosophy on the other, to precipitate his conversion to such a distinctive form of Christianity? The apostle Paul provides a clue.

Paul was being read and commented upon by many of Augustine's contemporaries and in the early years of the 390s Augustine undertook a series of works on Romans and Galatians.⁶ It was here that he found the material to articulate his understanding of the nature of moral evil, free will and grace. The question of evil had haunted Augustine from the very beginning of his search for truth, because it, more than anything else, militated against the Christian belief in an omnipotent, just and loving creator-God. The Manichees' dualistic explanation, which attributed evil to matter, but not to the transcendent God, for a while satisfied him, but later raised more problems than it solved: how could God be omnipotent if an independent force of evil could overcome the good? He found an answer to these problems in the notion (probably discovered in Plotinus) that evil is a privation of the good: that everything that exists is good, but in so far as it turns away from the good, it moves towards non-being, and thereby becomes evil. Reflecting on his own experience of evil by characteristically turning within in order to analyse his own inner experiences, emotions and passions, he vividly depicts the vitiated, flawed operation of his will, alienated and dissociated from itself, knowing the good but unable to act upon it, and thus locates the origin of evil in the turning of man's will away from the good. This was confirmed for him by Paul's portrait of his divided will in Rom. 7:15: 'For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not: but what I hate, that do I' (although this is very much Paul interpreted by Augustine: as Krister Stendahl [1963] has suggested, the sense of agonized interiority which Augustine describes was probably not Paul's own experience).

In the earlier commentaries on Paul he seems to have entertained the possibility

that God's election of sinful man was based on merit, on man's choice of faith and anticipation of God's grace, and that it was in this way that man moved from being under the law to being under grace. In a letter written to his friend, the priest Simplicianus, in 396, however, he sets forth explicitly, for the first time, a doctrine of original sin which leaves no room for merit, but makes everything hinge upon the operation of God's grace.

In response to Simplicianus' question concerning the fates of Esau and Jacob, which seem to have been determined before their birth, he expounds an uncompromising doctrine of the fallenness of man – of mankind as a *massa peccati*, 'one lump in which the original guilt [of Adam] remains throughout' (*Letter to Simplicianus* 2.17, 20) – of the culpability of all men, the impotence of man's will to do the good and the unmerited grace of God which can alone, regardless of faith, reason or works, inspire in man a delight in the good. These reflections mark a watershed in Augustine's thought which was to profoundly affect its future course. Romans 7 now became a portrait of man under grace, unable to do anything but sin without the inspiration of God's grace which moves his will to delight in the good, 'if these things delight us which serve our advancement towards God, that is due not to our own whim or industry or meritorious works, but to the inspiration of God and to the grace he bestows' (*To Simplicianus* 2.21).

The doctrine of original sin was not, however, Augustine's invention; rather, he was able to draw upon African tradition, not least Cyprian (who also used it to justify the baptism of infants) and Ambrose. He also appeals to a number of scriptural texts, especially 1 Cor. 15:22, 'As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be given life', and Rom. 5:12, 'in whom [sc. Adam] all sinned' (though, in fact, they are all probably either mistranslated or misconstrued.)⁷ The doctrine of original sin also makes him incline towards a traducianist (that all souls are derived from that of the first man and are handed on from one generation to the next) rather than a creationist (that a particular soul is created for each individual) explanation of the soul's origin. But it is his own experience of man's inveterate sinfulness, of the inner conflicts and incapacity of his will, which seems to have provided him with decisive proof of man's fallenness. Most especially, it is man's concupiscence, his disordered lust, evidenced most forcefully in sexual intercourse, which provides, for Augustine, decisive proof of his subjection to original sin. The will or reason no longer controls man's body in the ordered and harmonious fashion which would have characterized all its operations, including intercourse,⁸ before the fall; rather his actions are now characterized by disordered and uncontrolled concupiscence.

In the texts where he discusses the fall,⁹ however, Augustine is at a loss as to how to explain why Adam's will first turned away from his Creator and disobeyed His commandment. He suggests that perhaps the defection of Adam's will was attributable to his original creation from nothing, so that he is liable to move back to nothingness; that Eve, who was the first to be seduced by the serpent, was not yet as advanced in knowledge as Adam; that Adam, in 'friendly benevolence', went along with Eve, rather than abandon her; that he did not think God would deal with him so harshly; that Adam and Eve were already beginning to turn towards themselves in pride; that God foreknew the greater good he would bring from their sin and allowed the serpent to tempt them.

Whatever the reason for the fall, it meant that Adam and Eve, already mortal, were no longer on the path to immortality but justly subject to death. They no longer enjoyed a direct, intuitive knowledge of God or of each other, but became dependent upon language and signs in order to communicate, a means fraught with difficulties and open to misrepresentation, deception and ambiguity. In turning away from God they abandoned the source of their existence, that which gave it order, unity and harmony, and thereby found their attention fragmented, scattered and dispersed, attached and held as with glue to the temporal, mutable things to which they had turned. They became aliens and exiles from their true home; deaf and blind to the truth, subject to the whims of their vitiated will. They were wholly dependent upon the work of God's grace to heal their faculties and to enable them to desire, and move towards, their lost homeland. Such is Augustine's depiction of all men in this life.

Augustine's reflections on original sin in *To Simplicianus* are also the context for the near contemporary work, the *Confessions*, and provide the real key to understanding the way in which he interpreted, and chose to present, his conversion as the working of God's grace upon a mind which was, in fact, fundamentally alienated and dissociated from itself, which could not apprehend the truth, or will to act, without the revelation of God's grace in the incarnate Son to inspire his faith, hope and love. They also explain his rather daunting post-conversion portrait of himself in *Confessions* 10, as someone still subject to temptation, still prone to sin and still wholly dependent upon the grace of Christ, the mediator between God and man.¹⁰

PRIEST, BISHOP AND MONK

For Augustine, conversion to Christianity meant embracing celibacy. Obviously this was not a strict requirement, but it seems that he would be satisfied with nothing less than what he regarded as the acme of the Christian life. Why this was the case is difficult to establish. The highest rank of the Manichees, Augustine's former co-religionists, were distinguished by their celibacy. Asceticism, frequently expressed as celibacy, had long been the ideal of the philosophic life. The ascetic spirit, fostered by the likes of Tertullian, Cyprian and Ambrose in the West, had made significant inroads into Christian life and practice following the conversion of Constantine in 312, as an effective means of keeping alive the martyr spirit and of resisting 'secularization'. Augustine's first encounter with the famous *Life of Antony*, the Egyptian ascetic, and the story of two civil servants who had embraced celibacy on reading it for the first time, had been very influential in precipitating his conversion. Above all, Augustine seems to have possessed a natural monastic spirit,¹¹ which found its true home in a community of like-minded individuals, pursuing a common life, in friendship and love. After his baptism in Milan in 387 he immediately set about realizing this ideal in a retreat with family and friends at a country villa in the north Italian village of Cassiciacum, where he also began a series of predominantly philosophical works on such classical subjects as the nature of wisdom, scepticism, the happy life and order.

Although intending to return to his native town of Thagaste with his mother,

Monica, and friends to carry out their 'holy enterprise' (*Confessions* 9.9.2), presumably establishing a community, he was forced to spend a year in Rome, due to a blockade of the Mediterranean in 387–8. Here he no doubt became better acquainted with the vigorous ascetic movements and debates which characterized fourth-century Rome, and encountered for the first time male and female monastic houses organized following Eastern models.¹²

In Thagaste he established a lay community of *servi dei*, or servants of God, spending his time in fasting, prayer, study and good works,¹³ and completed a number of works which are more distinctively Christian in their concern with exegesis of scripture, the church, faith and the Incarnation, than those written at Cassiciacum.¹⁴ Although he tells us that he was careful not to visit towns which needed a bishop, it was while visiting a possible recruit for the Thagaste community in Hippo, in 392, that he was laid hold of by the congregation and forcibly ordained priest in order to help their own ageing bishop, Valerius. Quickly realizing the exceptional qualities of his priest, Valerius ensured he could not be snatched away by a neighbouring diocese, by (somewhat irregularly) ordaining him co-adjutor bishop to succeed him on his death. Thus Augustine was to spend the rest of his life as priest and from 396 as bishop of Hippo.

He also continued to pursue a communal life, first in a lay monastery in the garden of the basilica, and then, as bishop, in a clerical monastery established in the bishop's house.¹⁵ His *Rule*¹⁶ is explicitly modelled on the first Christian communities of Acts in its emphasis on the unity in charity of the common life of its members, with 'one heart and soul' directed towards God, putting the interests of the community before personal interest. Its primary concern is not with asceticism, 'holiness' or celibacy, but with the social, ethical aspects of life lived in common. The monastic vocation was the closest Augustine thought man might come, in this life, to overcoming the self-referential pride which had fractured society in the fall, and of approximating to the social life of the saints – even though, in practice, the community fell far short of such ideals and inevitably shared the unavoidable ambiguity of Christian life in a fallen, vitiated world.

From the moment of his ordination Augustine was never again free to pursue the life of a scholar. He was immediately obliged to preach, to address the assembled African bishops in council, to refute the Manichees, to battle against the Donatist schism which had torn the African church apart, as well as attempting to pursue his own writing. The latter was to become increasingly circumstantial, responding to needs, questions, challenges and demands as they arose.

As bishop these demands intensified, for not only was he expected to preach, celebrate and baptize (the first two often daily) but he also assumed the role of administrator and legal arbitrator which had fallen to the bishops following the conversion of Constantine. The church was now a legally recognized institution able to receive gifts, donations and bequests. It was the bishop's duty to administer these goods, which often included land and estates, for the benefit of the church and the needy to whom it had traditionally ministered. More importantly, the bishop could now arbitrate between any two parties who chose to consult him and who agreed to abide by his judgement. In an empire with no organized police force and no organized system of legal advice or representation this episcopal jurisdiction was

tremendously popular: it was free, quick and impartial. Augustine heard cases each weekday, frequently from morning until late afternoon – tedious, petty cases of family quarrels and disputes over land, property, debts, children. He also found himself interceding for members of his congregation to higher officials – with little success, to his enormous frustration.

SCRIPTURE AND PREACHING

Although Augustine would have preached almost every day – and therefore in all about eight thousand times – we possess only 546 extant sermons as well as the 124 *Tractates on John's Gospel*, the ten *Homilies on the First Epistle of John* and a series of sermons on all 150 Psalms. He was a very popular preacher, had an enthusiastic congregation at home and was often invited as a visiting preacher, especially at Carthage (see Figure 48.2). This was no doubt due to his simple, straightforward style, which, combined with his finely honed rhetorical skills and his training and experience as a teacher, enabled his congregation to build up a solid knowledge of scripture and to follow even the most difficult theological argument.

Augustine, however, as we have seen, regarded language as a result of the fall: before the fall man would have known and communicated intuitively, without the need for words. His awareness of the problems, and techniques, of teaching and



Figure 48.2 Remains of the Church of St Cyprian in Carthage where Augustine once preached. Photo J. C. N. Coulston.

communicating are cogently presented in *On Teaching the Uninstructed* and in a number of works on language and exegesis.¹⁷ Most especially, he is clear that for teaching to be rightly communicated and understood it must be motivated by, and received in, love.¹⁸ Thus, one of his favourite analogies for the role of the preacher is the descent of Christ to become incarnate in order to lead man back to Himself. Language, too, then, like the common life of the monastic community, when rooted in love, has a social function in enabling the Christian community to cohere, understand and live its faith. And for Augustine the language of Christianity was its scriptures.

When he had first examined the Christian scriptures as a student of rhetoric, fired by Cicero's *Exhortation to Philosophy*, they had jarred with his cultured sensibilities. They appeared crude, badly written and full of vulgarisms and solecisms, unworthy when compared with 'the dignity of Cicero' (*Confessions* 3.5.9). The early third-century Old Latin translation which Augustine no doubt consulted was indeed an extremely literal, rather poor translation, but scripture's defects were a notorious feature of pagan criticism of Christianity which any educated person, pagan or Christian, could not but be sensitive to. Augustine's attitude to them is therefore unavoidably ambiguous. To an extent, he was able to reconcile himself to them by finding features which could be accommodated to cultured, Late Antique taste: Ambrose had shown him that they were full of mysteries and could be interpreted allegorically in order to sound their spiritual depths; they could be analysed according to the rules of rhetoric and not found wanting (*On Christian Doctrine* 4).

Augustine was sensitive to questions of exegetical method. In some passages he outlines a fourfold sense (the historical, analogical, aetiological and allegorical), which necessitates a consideration of the author's intention, his culture and thought forms, his initial inspiration and also of the readers' possible interpretation and re-application of what he has said. He seems to allow for a multiplicity of meaning and interpretation on the part of author and reader, so long as neither contradict the basic rule of love of God and neighbour. Similarly, he allows for discrepancies between the authors of scripture (for example, in *On the Harmony of the Gospels*) on the basis that what matters is not the details each remembers and has presented in his own fashion, but their shared intention, which is unified because of their common inspiration by the Holy Spirit. It is in this context that he explains and justifies his frequent use of allegory as an exegetical tool, especially in sermons: it allows him to investigate the spiritual sense of the literal text of scripture; to present its truth to his hearers at their various levels; to meet the criticisms of scripture's sensitive, erudite pagan critics; to deal with obviously symbolic, figurative or otherwise offensive or absurd passages; to delight the hearer and inspire him to seek for, and delight in finding, the truth.

Most important was what the scriptures had to teach: humility not pride; confession not presumption; grace not self-reliance. These lessons of the Incarnation to fallen man were as relevant to the cultured critic as to the self-sufficient philosopher, and it is the commandment of love of God and neighbour, and the doctrine of the Incarnation, which provides the rules and method for Augustine's interpretation, rather than those of classical grammar and rhetoric.

Nevertheless, Augustine, like most of the Fathers, was a product of a classical

education; he had been formed by it, and to a large extent, even as a Christian, it determined his mind-set. It could not simply be dispensed with. It is with the rather ambiguous, but often fruitful, relation between classical culture and Christianity that we find Augustine coming to terms in *On Christian Doctrine* (*De doctrina Christiana*) which is both a work on Christian exegesis and preaching and also a detailed examination of the place and use of secular culture. Of course, pagan religious practice – idolatry, sacrifice, the mysteries – was wholly rejected, but other aspects of pagan culture – the disciplines, philosophy, moral rules, monotheist affirmations and aspirations – had so much in common with Christianity that they were often thought to be derived from earlier teaching in Moses and the prophets. These were ‘seeds of the Logos’ and could be legitimately appropriated and used by Christians who, like the Israelites, spoiled the Egyptians of their treasure.¹⁹ For Augustine, they are to be used in so far as they facilitate the interpretation, and expression in preaching, of the truth of scripture.

CHRISTIANITY AND PAGANISM

Secular culture was an issue for Augustine and his contemporaries, not just at a cultural, literary level, but also, as our comments about the social function of scripture above might suggest, at a social level too. Although the empire became officially Christian in the course of the fourth century, following Constantine’s conversion, the society in which the church found itself was still more than vestigially pagan. Indeed, some scholars suggest that the church made very little impact indeed on the municipal life of the towns of the empire which remained, if not pagan, at least secular and ‘unchristianized’: it showed no interest in those institutions and offices of state which had traditionally been grounded in paganism; provided no alternatives to the pagan civic rites; did not erect Christian civic buildings or establish Christian schools.²⁰ But Augustine could not but be aware of the ‘vestigial’ paganism of his congregation. As his sermons witness, they still carried charms, wore amulets, consulted diviners, swore oaths, used the pagan religious calendar, observed the old funerary customs, and, most especially, took part in the processions and attended the theatre, games, spectacles and shows which were still a central part of civic life. In a very real way it was the duty of the bishop to define just what being a Christian meant in this shadowy and confusing overlap of sacred and secular in the lives of his congregation.²¹ Indeed, Augustine and his fellow bishops were forced into making very clear-cut distinctions when imperial policy turned from toleration to the proscription of paganism under Theodosius.

THE UNATTAINABILITY OF PERFECTION

Augustine’s understanding of man’s fall, of original sin, and of the operation of divine grace meant that any school or doctrine which claimed to be able to attain perfection in this life was, in his eyes, fundamentally unsound and contradictory to Christian doctrine and experience. In the course of his episcopate he encountered

three such schools of thought which each, in different ways, challenged his understanding of the Christian life and forced him to defend and elaborate the basic principles of his faith. The first, which proclaimed itself to be the true, holy and untainted Catholic church in Africa, was the Donatist schism. The second, which upheld the individual's freedom to will to do the good unhindered by original sin, was represented by the school of Pelagius. The third was the classical idea of a wholly just and peaceful society realizable in this life.

Donatism

The Donatist church²² (so called after its main founder, Donatus, bishop of Carthage [313–55]) was a schism within the African church which arose during the Great Persecution of 303–5 among those who had taken a rigorous, separatist, uncompromising stance towards other Catholics, who, for whatever reason or by whatever means, seemed to have compromised with the Roman authorities, by, for example, handing over the sacred scriptures (see Chapter 37 in this volume). The rigourists refused to accept as bishop of Carthage someone whom they regarded as tainted by the sin of such compromise. Thus two churches were formed, and over the years, despite fierce imperial opposition, the Donatist faction became deeply established in African tradition and custom, so much so that by Augustine's day it was larger than the Catholic church and for many had become very much the Catholic church in Africa.

The Donatists represented an attempt to preserve the true identity of the African church – the church of the martyrs, of Cyprian and Tertullian – and also a movement of opposition to the world which they regarded as hostile and demonic. They were prepared to defend their faith to the death, to preserve the church without spot or wrinkle. In their opposition to the state the Donatist schismatics seem to have attracted the support of its other disaffected critics, who, whether for economic, political or strategic reasons, wished to defy Imperial policy. Some scholars have identified the origins of the Donatist schism in these varied non-religious grievances, but even their most extreme wing, the violent, criminal gangs of martyr-seeking circumcellions, were primarily religious in their self-understanding.

The schism was one Augustine had to counter from the moment of his ordination. He did so in a characteristically thorough and dedicated manner, even though it necessarily distracted him from more congenial, and often more pressing, concerns. He meticulously and painstakingly established the history and facts of the schism for himself, compiling huge dossiers of evidence with which he corrected Optatus' earlier version of the schism; he ensured that his own clergy were beyond reproach by taking energetic measures to enforce clerical discipline, preached innumerable sermons, attempted to organize public debates, and composed numerous treatises and letters to Donatist leaders and bishops.²³ However, his efforts would probably have been in vain without the aid of imperial legislation.

In 405 the emperor Honorius issued an Edict of Unity which for the first time branded the Donatists not only as schismatics but as heretics, and therefore subject to strict and punitive laws. The final, official blow to a weakened Donatist church came in 411 following the momentous Conference of Carthage, when Donatist and

Catholic bishops from throughout Africa faced each other under the presidency of the imperial representative, Marcellinus. In 412 the Edict of Unity was renewed and Donatism became a criminal offence, with a scale of fines according to rank. Clergy were exiled and property was to be surrendered. Although the Donatists did not give in, they were inevitably weakened and their future restricted.

The controversy raised a number of practical, as well as theological issues for Augustine, which were to shape his understanding of the nature of the church and its sacraments, as well as its relation to the state.

His attitude to the persecution and coercion of heretics was at first an ambiguous one, but faced with the violence of the circumcellions, who were not above theft, arson, assault or murder, and the Donatists' deep-rooted, defiant hostility which his own efforts had done little to counter, he seems to have become increasingly supportive of state intervention. He buttressed his acceptance with arguments for the necessity of loving discipline, correction and punishment in order to persuade the sinner of his fault, convert him to the truth, and, perhaps, eventually to even change his inner attitude and bring about a genuine conversion. However, he unfailingly intervened to moderate what he regarded as excessive punishment and to avert the death penalty.

The Donatists regarded themselves as the true Catholic church in Africa, which had stood firm during the persecutions and which was untainted by the sins of apostasy or compromise with the state authorities. They had preserved the church as a pure and holy congregation of the saints. Augustine ridicules their position: is anyone without sin? Who are they to judge the whole of the rest of the church throughout the world, which is largely unaware of them, and to condemn it? Do they not also suffer internal schisms and sinful behaviour? Have they not appealed to the authorities when it suited them? Obviously his theology of the fall, original sin, the operation of divine grace and election led him to cut incisively through the Donatists' all too circumstantial and convenient arguments to demonstrate that the most heinous sin is not that of compromise but of schism, whereby they had cut themselves off from the unity of charity in the universally recognized Catholic church; that all men are unavoidably sinful; that the church necessarily comprehends righteous and unrighteous and will remain a mixture of wheat and tares until the Last Judgement; that no one merits salvation; that the only source of holiness and purity within the church is Christ in His Holy Spirit.

The last point was the crux of Augustine's argument against the Donatists' insistence that the priestly orders of the clergy of the Catholic church were invalidated and rendered ineffective by sin and that therefore the sacraments they administered were likewise tainted, invalid and ineffective. The one source of sanctification, holiness, purity and sacramental effectiveness, Augustine argued, was Christ, through his Holy Spirit, irrespective of the moral character of the minister; the sacraments are 'holy in themselves' (*On Baptism* 4.18). Furthermore, the sacraments were valid, wherever they were administered, if they were performed in the name of Christ who instituted them, following the correct form of words. There was therefore no need for rebaptism, as the Donatists argued: even Donatist baptism, in these terms, was valid. But to be effective for salvation, however, the baptized needed to be reconciled to the unity of the Catholic church, as it was only here that

the Spirit can be given and received. The Donatists' separation from the church is a sign of their lack of charity, the absence of the Holy Spirit, and without this, like a tree without roots, everything they did would be fruitless.

Pelagianism

The movement which has become known as 'Pelagianism'²⁴ does not just refer to the thought of Pelagius, but to a number of authors throughout the empire, from Britain to Sicily, Spain to the Holy Land, whose thought varied according to their specific contexts and concerns but who together possess a certain homogeneity, either through their acquaintance with Pelagius or because of the basic perfectionist thrust of their ideas.

Pelagius (350–425) himself was a British monk who first lived in Bethlehem and then in Rome, whose teaching proved especially popular with a group of influential, extremely conservative, Roman aristocrats because of its asceticism and call for perfection through a strict moral code. Its uncompromisingly high standards allowed them to set themselves apart from 'institutional' Christianity and become true Christians, *integri Christiani*. (Augustine's insistence upon celibacy in embracing Christianity can, strangely, be placed in the same context.)

Pelagius and his followers stood in a tradition firmly rooted in classical moral reflection, which insisted upon individual self-determination, moral responsibility, autonomy of will, and the realization of perfection through knowledge. Apart from a commentary on Romans, Pelagius' work consists largely of letters of ascetic advice and moral exhortation to converts, penitents, virgins, celibates and widows. Advising Demetrias, the daughter of an eminent noble family who wanted to pursue a vocation of virginity, he was emphatic that the choice of good or evil is 'voluntary and independent, not bound by necessity' (*To Demetrias* 3.2); that man possesses natural goodness, reason and wisdom, an inner law, which enables him to recognize and serve God. Although sin might obscure this natural state, he urged that it is not a fault in our nature but our will, and that man's original state can be restored by the remission of sin and Christ's new law appropriated in baptism. It is baptism, above all else, which marks the decisive break with man's past life for it remits his sins, and which allows the new law to operate and restores his original, natural state of knowledge and freedom.

Pelagius had encountered criticism and hostility well before his encounter with Augustine and had already engaged in fierce controversy with Jerome. His arrival in North Africa as an exile, following the fall of Rome in 410, brought him into a context where his teaching, and that of his followers, almost immediately faced censure. Foremost among the latter was Caelestius, who remained in Carthage while Pelagius went on to Palestine. His open denial of Adam's original sin, its transmission to his descendants, of the necessity of infant baptism and his conviction that it was possible for man to be sinless, led to his condemnation and excommunication. The issues were brought to Augustine's notice by letter and from then on, in a number of early treatises and letters, we find Augustine rebutting Pelagianist ideas.²⁵

But it was only in 415 that he began to attack Pelagius himself in *On Nature and*

Grace. From that moment on Pelagian teaching was condemned by councils, imperial rescripts and church canons, and its proponents relentlessly pursued. As a result 'Pelagianism' was definitively identified and its details defined. It was a heresy which Augustine used all his powers to counter in numerous treatises, in particular against the southern Italian bishop, Julian of Eclanum, on the subjects of original sin, infant baptism, grace, free will, marriage and concupiscence, until the end of his life.²⁶

To Augustine the effects of Adam's fall and the inheritance of his sin (original sin) were abundantly clear in man's vitiated will, his inability to will or to do the good, and in the lust (concupiscence) which overcame his reason. He therefore argued for the necessity of baptism, even for new-born infants, in order to remit the guilt of original sin. Even so, he was aware that the effects of original sin remained after baptism: no one can do anything of himself but sin; in order to do the good he stands in continual need of God's grace. Whereas for Pelagius grace was found in the power which enables man freely to will and to act, in man's created nature and in the 'new law' introduced by Christ's teaching and example which restored that nature, for Augustine the law was of no avail without the aid of God's Spirit. Without the life-giving Spirit the law is the 'letter that kills'. It is not enough for man to obey simply through fear of punishment or hope of reward, he must be moved to desire, love and delight in it – and this is the work of grace.

Reflections such as these made it difficult for Augustine to speak meaningfully of freedom in relation to man's will. In some contexts he speaks of God as helper, as preparing the will, of man cooperating with God, and resists the idea of compulsion in the operation of the will under grace. Many passages do, however, seem to suggest that divine election is irresistible. The reader needs to be aware that what Augustine has in mind is not the power of grace to coerce, override or control the will but rather its ability to unfailingly call forth a response which corresponds with man's true identity as a creature of God, a response of freely willed subjection, delight, desire for, and love of God's revelation. This is effected by God making what is good at the same time attractive, pleasing and delightful to man: 'the good begins to be desired when it begins to be sweet . . . therefore the blessing of sweetness is the grace of God, whereby we are made to delight in and to desire, that is, to love, what he commands us' (*Against the Letters of Pelagius* 2.21). God does not thereby deny man his freedom but enables him to attain it.

The fact that some are not saved, however, raised and continues to raise, intractable problems for Augustine's theory of grace. Why do some believe, while others do not? For Augustine, this is a matter of God's election, not human merit. But if so, why does he choose some but not others? What occupied Augustine, however, was not so much why some are left to damnation but rather why, when all men justly deserve damnation, God has shown mercy by electing some to be saved. His doctrine of original sin, divine election, foreknowledge and predestination was unable to answer why some were not saved, but was nevertheless able to demonstrate that the fact that they were not was wholly just. To the monks of Hadrumetum,²⁷ in North Africa, and those in Marseilles,²⁸ in southern Gaul, for whom this theology seemed to undermine their *raison d'être* and to leave no room for human responsibility or initiative, he argues forcibly that both the beginning of faith (which the monks at

Marseilles wished to attribute to man's free choice) and the perseverance to continue in faith, are wholly the work of grace.

The two cities²⁹

When Rome fell to Alaric and his Gothic troops in 410 the future of a number of long-held ideals was also threatened. Since Constantine's conversion in 312 there had been a strong current of Christian thought, beginning with Eusebius of Caesarea, which regarded the empire as God's chosen vehicle to establish the Christian church throughout the earth, and the emperor as an almost Messianic figure, providentially appointed to deliver the empire from the forces of paganism and to ensure its salvation in the Christian church. This 'imperial theology' suffered a tremendous blow when Rome, the heart of the empire, fell to barbarian forces. The pagans, of course, as they had always done in times of crisis, blamed the catastrophe on the Christians' neglect of the gods, who could now be seen wreaking their revenge.

Augustine responded to the pagans' charges by addressing them – or at least, the cultured, aristocratic intellectuals who voiced these charges – in the first half of his *City of God*. Arguing from the same pagan classics as his opponents, he demonstrated that Rome had suffered similar crises well before the advent of Christianity; that this was not the judgement of the gods, who were mere jumped-up mortals, but the judgement of divine providence on their vicious subjection of others, not for the sake of peace or justice, but for personal glory and the desire to dominate. As Cicero had made clear, the Romans had long ago ceased to be a commonwealth in any real sense, because they failed to give to everyone their due.

Although Augustine's earliest work shows some leaning towards an 'imperial theology' it is obvious that after 410 he decisively broke with any conception of living in 'Christian times'. Rather, as Robert Markus has demonstrated,³⁰ he seems to regard the empire as 'theologically neutral', as having no role to play in the work of divine providence, for good or evil, but merely as part of the temporal, as it were, secular, context (*saeculum*), in which Christians and pagans alike lead their lives in the world. Instead, he increasingly drew upon Tyconius, earlier Christian tradition (especially early Jewish-Christian works), scripture, and themes first sketched within his own earlier works, to develop the idea of two cities – the city of God and the city of the world. He understood these cities to be societies made up of individuals united by a common goal or aim. The city of God included all those predestined by God for salvation, whose goal was not earthly goods or glory, but obedience to, and love of God and the common good. The city of this world, on the other hand, comprehends all those who have turned away from God to temporal goods, who seek their own selfish ends and who are therefore destined for damnation.

In developing the theme of the two cities, one of Augustine's main preoccupations is polemical: to refute those philosophers, and those Christian idealists, who thought that man's ultimate good, the happy life, the ideal city, true justice and peace could be attained in this life.³¹ He regards such thought as 'amazing folly' which, given the wretched necessities of life in society, everyone, without exception, encounters and suffers at every level of human existence: in the family, the city, the

world; they exist even among the angels. Experience underlines the fundamentally flawed and vitiated nature of the human will, the essentially selfish, self-seeking nature of human society, the impossibility of ever attaining peace or realizing true justice. All of this, for Augustine, is a sign of man's fallenness, of the outworkings of original sin.

In this life, therefore, where true peace and justice are unattainable, the two cities are inextricably interwoven; their members share the same society, the same city, the same occupations and laws, and, in some cases, the same family and worship. Because the city of God can only be fully realized in the life to come, its divinely elected and predestined citizens are separated from the city of the world only in will and their desire for their ultimate goal. In this world they are pilgrims, resident aliens, using and abiding by the powers, institutions and laws that be. They take part in government, the administration of the law and military service, in order to maintain whatever degree of peace and justice is possible after the fall, aware that its effects need to be delimited and controlled.

Even the church cannot be identified with the city of God. Although he believed that membership of it, through baptism, was necessary to belong to the city of God, Augustine was well aware, as he made clear during the Donatist controversy, that it in fact contained wheat and tares, righteous and unrighteous, the predestined elect and the damned, and that they will only finally be separated in the life to come.

The last four books of the *City of God* deal with the consummation and fulfilment of history in eternity, in the Last Judgement, Heaven and Hell. Asserting the original and eternal unity of the body and soul Augustine takes a distinctly anti-Platonic stand in defending a doctrine of the resurrection of the body, and discussing the problems which arise from it. In heaven there will be no longer be any need for communication by language and signs, there will be no time or mutability, no need for faith and hope, no need to 'use' and refer things to God; rather, there will be eternal contemplation, love and possession of God Himself, giving rise to eternal praise. Whereas now we can only see 'through a glass darkly', there we shall see 'face to face'.

DOCTRINE

Faith and reason

The crucial role which philosophy, and especially Neoplatonism, played in Augustine's conversion means that his early reflection on the Christian faith takes place very much within a rational, philosophically inspired context, in which the emphasis was placed upon the attainment of truth through the exercise of the mind in the liberal disciplines. These intellectual arts, he thought, enabled man to extricate himself from the temporal, mutable and deceptive reality experienced by the senses and to attain the eternal, immutable truth which can only be grasped by the highest, spiritual part of man: his mind, soul or intellect.

Augustine, was, however, moved to fundamentally revise and temper his early confidence in reason in a number of decisive ways. First of all, his polemic against

the Manichees, which became more urgent when he returned to Africa, led him to emphasize and defend the important role of faith in apprehending the truth, as opposed to their claim to be able to explain everything by reason.³² Second, his attempts to communicate the Christian faith to his largely illiterate, uneducated congregation could not but make him acutely conscious of the incongruence between traditional, philosophically based classical culture and their simple devotion and insight into the faith. His attempts to adapt his teaching to their various levels led to a deeper appreciation of the necessity and usefulness of faith. Whilst faith and reason are complementary, and reason enables us to decide between authorities, we must believe in order to understand.

It was his developed doctrine of the fall, however, with its conviction that the truth is inaccessible to man's darkened mind, and unattainable by his vitiated will, which confirmed for Augustine the indispensability of faith in God's temporal revelation of Himself to fallen man within the very temporal, mutable realm in which man's fragmented self has become imprisoned. It is in this context that Augustine's mature understanding of the scriptures, and his doctrines of creation, salvation history and, most especially, of the Incarnation are fully worked out.

Incarnation

Augustine did not write a work specifically on the Incarnation; rather, his reflections on God becoming man are found in a number of different contexts.³³ Most of these are pastoral, where he is primarily concerned to make clear the exemplary, healing, pedagogic, salvific and sacramental role of the Incarnation. In other contexts Augustine's intention is obviously polemical, and he expounds orthodox doctrine against Docetists, Apollinarians, Arians, Photinians and Sabellians. He also often seems to expound Christological doctrine with the philosophers in mind. This was not least because, although he was prepared to concede (following Rom. 1:19–20) that some philosophers had been able, through reason, to see the truth, he is convinced that they cannot understand or attain it because the only way to truth is a confession of humble faith which follows the way which is Christ; the proud presumption of the philosophers who think they can grasp the truth through their own powers is merely a symptom of their failure to do so.

Although he was largely ignorant of eastern Christological debates and terminology, Augustine does attempt to emphasize the unity of the Word, soul and body, of Godhead and manhood in Christ, partly in order to oppose the philosophers' denigration of the flesh and partly to counter their repugnance at the idea of the resurrection of the body. Perhaps most importantly, however, the unity of Godhead and manhood in Christ forms the basis for Augustine's emphasis upon Christ as the One Mediator between God and man, who was able to effect what the demonic mediators of pagan theurgy could never achieve. As God and man, as both the wisdom (*sapientia*) and the knowledge (*scientia*) of God, he is uniquely able to lead man from the temporal realm (of *scientia*) into which he has fallen to the realm (of *sapientia*) from which he has fallen. In this sense, Christianity offers the 'Universal Way' to salvation which the philosophers had sought but never found (*City of God* 10.32).

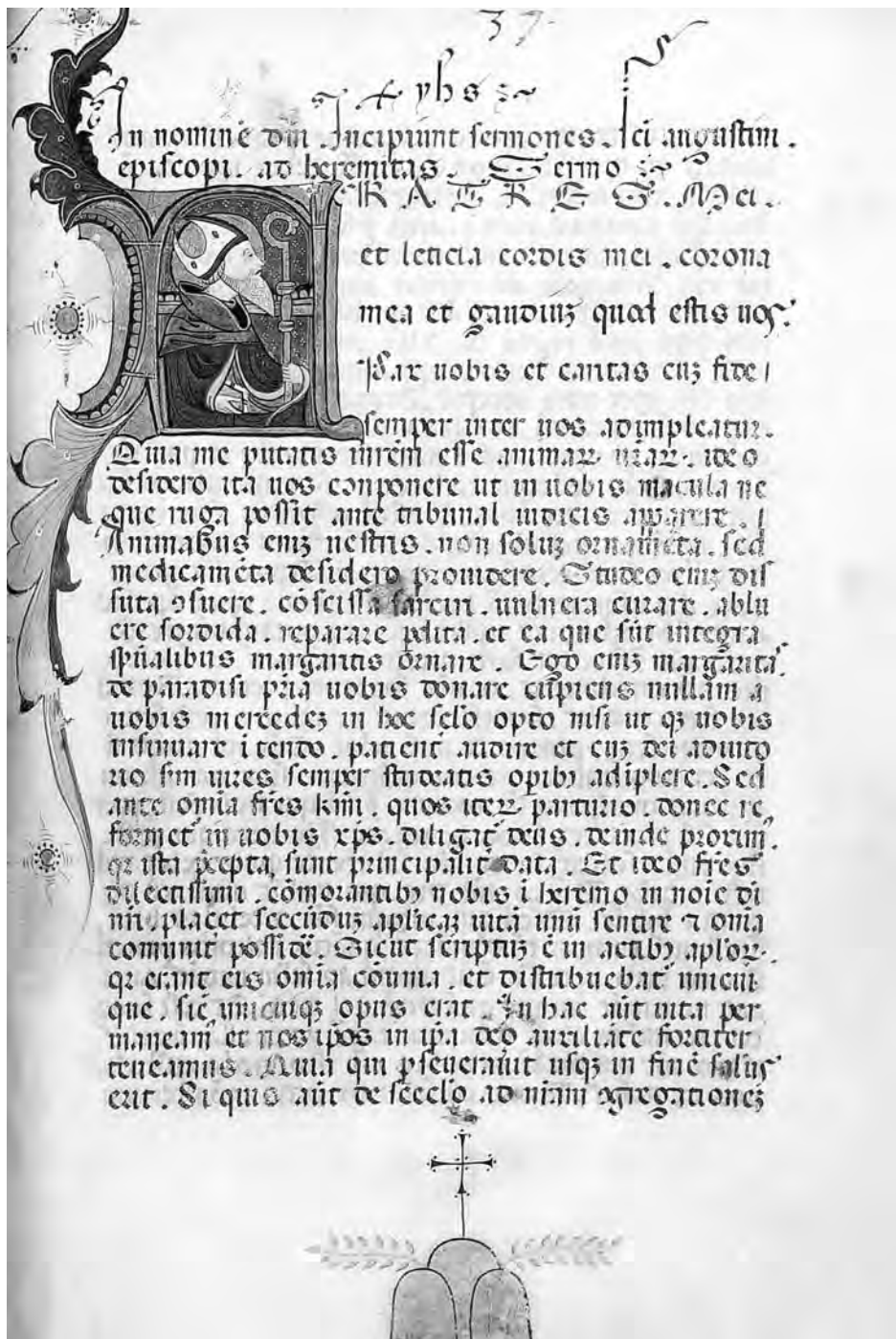


Figure 48.3 First folio of a fourteenth-century Italian manuscript of the *Sermones ad Eremitas* of St Augustine, showing a portrait of St Augustine. Courtesy of St Andrews University Library, MS BR65.A9S2.

The Trinity

Aware that there was very little reflection on the Trinity within the Latin tradition and that much Greek thought was inaccessible to Latin speakers, Augustine worked on his 15-book *On the Trinity* over a period of 20 years (399–419). Although polemical considerations do not predominate, he was aware of the threat which Arianism and Sabellianism, in particular, posed to Trinitarian doctrine, and at various points seeks to refute them. His main concern, however, seems to have been to define and illustrate the traditional, orthodox doctrine of the equality of substance within the Trinity and the inseparable operation of its persons. He establishes the basis for this doctrine, and therefore its authority, in the scriptural account of the Incarnation of the Son and the revelation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.³⁴

In examining the traditional, philosophical terminology which had been used to articulate the doctrine of the Trinity he is aware that the simple transposition of Greek terms, such as *ousia* and *hypostaseis*, into Latin would be misleading and confusing, since they could only be translated as one essence and three substances. Although he himself preferred the term 'essence' or 'nature' to refer to the One Trinity, he acknowledges the traditional use of 'substance', and therefore endorses the traditional Latin terminology of one substance and (in order not to remain silent, though aware of the inadequacies of language) three persons. He stresses, however, that despite the language of three persons, the only way in which we can meaningfully talk of distinction within the Trinity is in terms of relation: of the unbegotten Father, the begotten Son, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son. In every other respect, in mind, will, substance and attributes, they are identical. In describing the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son Augustine's intention was not polemical. He was simply drawing upon Latin precedents and was unaware of the Greek creed of Constantinople (381) which stated that the Spirit proceeded from the Father.

In Books 8–15 Augustine proceeds to examine various similitudes to illustrate the inseparable operation and identical nature of the three persons of the Trinity. In a rather original way, he derives his similitudes from the image of God in man, assuming, on the basis of Gen. 1:26 ('Let us make man in our image and our likeness') that it is a Trinitarian image. In man's capacity for self-awareness, reason and love (which he at one point defines as memory, understanding and love) he locates that which sets him apart from the rest of creation and enables him to come closest to his Creator. Most especially, in man's awareness, knowledge and love of the Trinity as revealed in the incarnate Christ, he finds the means whereby the deformed, fragmented, fallen image of God in man might be reformed and ultimately come to full knowledge and love of the Trinity.

It is clear, however, that the reformation of the image of God in man will never be fulfilled in this life: it is a gradual, progressive process of faith, hope and love, whereby the operation of God's grace and the revelation of His love in the incarnate Christ enables man's response, to bring him to ultimate perfection in the life to come.

CONCLUSION

Augustine remained bishop of Hippo until his death in 430 CE. As he recited the penitential psalms on his death bed, and wept for his sins, Hippo was being besieged by the Vandals, Alans and Goths under their leader Geiseric. They finally took the town, and, after an orgy of looting, pillage, murder, rape and torture, evacuated it and burnt it to the ground in 431. A whole world came to an end with Augustine's passing.

What survived, quite extraordinarily, was Augustine's library in the *secretarium* of the basilica at Hippo, which contained, amongst other things, the vast body of his own works, which he had spent the last years of his life carefully annotating, correcting and commenting upon in his *Retractations*. Through these, he continues to give us one of our closest insights into the history and theology of the West in Late antiquity.

NOTES

- 1 The most accessible general books on Augustine in English are Bonner (1963, 1987), Brown (1967), Chadwick (1995), Clark (1993), O'Donnell (1992) and Rist (1994). Madec (1994), in French, should not, however, be missed.
- 2 See Brown (1992) and Kaster (1988).
- 3 On Manichaeism see Brown (1972: 94–118), Lieu (1985: 117–53) and Bonner (1963: 157–236).
- 4 See Madec (1996) and O'Donnell (1992: II, 421–4).
- 5 That is, theurgy. Augustine has Porphyry, in particular, in mind. Cf. *City of God* 10.
- 6 See Frederiksen (1986).
- 7 Kirwan (1989: 131–2).
- 8 Augustine is a rare exception to the Fathers' general teaching that sexual intercourse is a result of the fall. See *Literal Commentary on Genesis* 9.3.6.
- 9 *City of God* 14; *Literal Commentary on Genesis* 11.
- 10 1 John 2.16.
- 11 Lawless (1987: 36).
- 12 See *On the Morals of the Catholic Church and the Manichees*.
- 13 *Vita* 3.
- 14 *The Teacher*; 83 *Diverse Questions*; *On the Morals of the Catholic Church*; *On True Religion*; *On Genesis against the Manichees*.
- 15 He probably didn't know of Eusebius of Vercelli's (363) similar arrangement in northern Italy.
- 16 The male version (*Praeceptum*) was written c. 395/6 and was probably soon after re-edited in a form for nuns (*Regularis informatio*) in the convent where Augustine's own sister was superior (Verheijen 1967).
- 17 *On Dialectic*; *The Teacher*; *On Christian Doctrine*.
- 18 *On Christian Doctrine*, prologue 6; *On Teaching the Uninstructed* 10.15.
- 19 *On Christian Doctrine* 2.40.60.
- 20 Lepelley (1975).
- 21 Brown (1995) and Markus (1997).
- 22 On Donatism see Brown (1972: 237–59, 279–300), Crespin (1965), Frend (1952),

- Monceaux (1922: IV, VII) and Tengström (1964).
- 23 Including *Psalm against the Donatists*; *Against Cresconius*; *Against the Letter of Parmenianus*; *Against the Writings of Petilianus*; *On Baptism against the Donatists*; *Against Gaudentius*.
- 24 On Pelagianism see Bonner (1987), Brown (1972), Evans (1968) and Rees (1991).
- 25 *On the Consequences of Sins and their Forgiveness*; *On the Spirit and the Letter*; *Epistle* 157.
- 26 *Against the Letters of Pelagius*; *On Marriage and Concupiscence*; *Against Julian*; *Unfinished Refutation of Julian's Second Response*.
- 27 *On Grace and Free Will*; *On Correction and Grace*.
- 28 *On the Predestination of the Saints*; *On the Gift of Perseverance*.
- 29 On the *City of God* and Augustine's social and political thought see Markus (1970), Ruokanen (1993) and Van Oort (1991).
- 30 Markus (1970: 42–51).
- 31 See especially Book 19.
- 32 For example, in *On True Religion* and *On the Usefulness of Belief*.
- 33 For secondary literature see van Bavel (1954), Rémy (1979), Verwilghen (1985) and Madec (1989).
- 34 For secondary literature see Sullivan (1963), Schindler (1965) and, more recently, Barnes (1995).

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EPHREM THE SYRIAN¹



Kathleen E. McVey

EPHREM: LIFE, CHARACTER AND IMPORTANCE

Ephrem the Syrian, the foremost writer in the Syriac tradition of Christianity, was born in Nisibis c. 306 CE. He came from a Christian family, as he himself affirms in a famous passage in his *Hymns against Heresies* 26.10:

In the way of truth was I born
even though I as a child did not yet perceive it.
Examining, I acquired it for myself, as I perceived it.
My faith despised the confusing paths that came toward me.

There are many possible interpretations of ‘the confusing paths’ among which the young Ephrem found himself. Nisibis was a very ancient city with great commercial, political and military significance in his time. After a century of struggle between the Roman and Persian empires, Syro-Mesopotamia had been restored to Roman control by a treaty of 298 CE, which specified Nisibis as the only place for commercial exchange between these two mighty empires. Its population and hence its cultural environment were constituted by a mix of many diverse peoples: Arameans, Arabs, Parthians, Iranians, Greeks, Jews and Romans.

There had been Christians in Nisibis since at least the late second century, as the epitaph of bishop Abercios of Hierapolis attests. This earliest community of Nisibene Christians may have been heterodox by western Christian standards. Scholars are divided in their views since the sources are scarce and difficult to place chronologically, geographically and theologically. Some consider works such as the *Odes of Solomon*, Tatian’s *Diatessaron*, the *Gospel of Thomas* or the *Acts of Thomas*, as witnesses to an ascetic, encratite, form of Jewish Christianity, brought to Syro-Mesopotamia by converts to Christianity from a sectarian Jewish group like those at Qumran. Others believe the first Christians in this area are more properly understood to be gnostics or Marcionites.

No doubt the multicultural environment and the theological diversity of Syro-Mesopotamian Christianity caused some confusion for Christians there in the early fourth century. Further, the relation of Christians to the Roman imperial power was equally bewildering. Immediately after the restoration of Nisibis to Rome, the

brutal Diocletianic persecution had claimed at least three men and four women martyrs from among Nisibene Christians: Hermas, a confessor; Adelphos, a soldier; and Gaios, Olivia, Eutropia, Leonis and Febronia. In his childhood, Ephrem saw the establishment of Christian Rome under Constantine, and his bishop, Jacob of Nisibis, attended the Council of Nicaea in 325.

When bishop Jacob returned from the Council, he appointed Ephrem as 'interpreter' or 'exegete' in Nisibis. Although this is not a title or office known elsewhere, it apparently entailed the composition of hymns, homilies and commentaries for the instruction of the Christian people of the town.

Ephrem is one of the first Syriac writers to emerge into the light of history with a large body of extant writings intact. Whatever the nature of the pre-Constantinian Christianity in his home, Ephrem himself was deeply committed to Nicene orthodoxy and to its defence and propagation. We know him almost exclusively through the writings he composed for this purpose with the endorsement of a succession of orthodox bishops.

As Rome and Persia continued the struggle for domination of Mesopotamia, Ephrem's homeland became a battleground, and he became a passionate chronicler of the religious and political dimensions of the war. Here, too, his allegiance was clearly to Rome, as the divinely ordained Christian power. He was an eyewitness to the Roman military procession into Nisibis with the corpse of the defeated emperor, Julian 'the Apostate'. He mourned, not the faithless emperor but the tribulations of the Nisibene Christians who were forced to abandon their native city and move westward in order to remain within the Roman empire. He, too, went to Edessa, where he continued to write and where he is said to have established a school of biblical and theological studies and women's choirs to sing his hymns. Ordained to the diaconate there, he died while ministering to victims of famine in 373 CE.²

In his hymns and other writings it is evident that, despite his passionate commitment to orthodoxy, Ephrem appreciated the beauty and usefulness of the ante-Nicene Syriac Christian literature. Thus he wrote commentaries not only on the canonical scripture but also on Tatian's *Diatessaron*. He often utilizes graphic feminine imagery for God, as some of the *Odes of Solomon* had done. In his *Hymns on the Pearl* he explores the image of salvation as a precious pearl, an image which has roots not only in the New Testament but also in the gnostic *Hymn of the Pearl* in the *Acts of Thomas*. Yet his *Hymns against Heresies* are harshly polemical, attacking Mani, Marcion, Bardaisan and the astrologers.

Similarly, he is a well-informed but often contentious critic of Judaism. His *Hymns on Paradise* and his *Commentary on Genesis and Exodus* are permeated with non-canonical Jewish traditions. His *Carmina Nisibena* represent a Christian appropriation of the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament. Yet in many of his compositions each positive theological statement seems to evoke propositions for refutation. The unseen opponent may be Jewish as often as pagan or heretical. Consequently, as he expounds his Trinitarian doctrine in the *Sermons on Faith*, he also argues against Judaizing Christians as well as against Arians. In his *Paschal Hymns* he elaborates a theology of redemption in the midst of polemics against Jewish ritual. The incarnational theology of his *Nativity Hymns* is commingled with arguments in defence of Mary's virginity against those — apparently Jewish critics — who would deny it.

In the complex and uncertain world of fourth-century Mesopotamia, Ephrem's emphatic belligerence is comprehensible. In the Graeco-Roman context, moreover, where virtuoso displays of rhetoric in what was a highly competitive culture (see Chapter 1 of this volume) were highly prized, his compositions were stunningly successful. His ability to couch his polemics in richly symbolic verse and to set them to familiar melodies made his efforts all the more memorable and thus more effective. Having seen the damage done over centuries by hostile inter-religious rhetoric, so easily translated into violent acts, most Christians today rightly hesitate to wield the rhetorical rapier against heretics, pagans and adherents to Judaism as Late Antique Christians did. Clearly a passionate man, deeply persuaded that God's love and redemption are present and on display for all who open their eyes and ears, Ephrem had little patience for those who saw things differently. It is a challenge to his contemporary readers to disentangle the beauty of his symbolic theology from his recurrent polemics.

Ephrem's importance for the history of Syriac literature, and for the history of Christianity in the Syriac-speaking context, is immense. His hymns, incorporated early into the liturgy, have remained central in both the East and West Syrian



Figure 49.1 St Ephrem, as portrayed in a twelfth-century manuscript belonging to the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas (Dam. Pat. 12/15, folio 5b). Photo Kathleen McVey.

liturgical traditions. The literary and hymnic forms that he used, some of which he may have invented, became the standard forms of all subsequent Syriac literature and hymnography. The success of his hymns helped to make hymnody a central teaching method of his church from his own time down to the present. Although his works incorporate many of the themes found in the Jewish-Christian or gnostic writings of the earliest Syriac Christianity, Ephrem's commitment to Nicene orthodoxy set the subsequent direction of the Syriac church. He lived almost exactly the same years as Athanasius, and in his own way Ephrem was just as dedicated to the Nicene *homoousion* (the idea that Christ was 'of the same being' with the Father) as Athanasius. In his own lifetime and for a half-century thereafter, his method of biblical interpretation was the sole standard among Syriac writers. Even after the formal introduction of Greek hermeneutical methods in the fifth century, Ephrem's interpretations continued to be studied and held in esteem. Despite uncertainty over the precise lines of his contact with Greek culture, not only a concept of orthodoxy but also many philosophical presuppositions and literary forms analogous to those of Greek Christian theological literature are to be found in his work, and through him they descend in the Syriac heritage.³

Appreciation of Ephrem's hymns was not limited to those who spoke Syriac. Writing within decades of his death, Jerome attests his fame in the Latin church. The fifth-century Greek church historians portray him as a model of the ascetic life and extol his extraordinary poetic gift. Both Jerome and the Greek writers assert that even in translation they were able to appreciate his eloquence. The translation of his works into Greek had begun even during his lifetime, and in the following centuries they were translated into virtually every language known to Christianity.⁴ Although study of the nature and extent of his influence on later western Christianity is still in a fairly rudimentary stage, it is clear that he played a significant role in the development of both Byzantine hymnography and western medieval religious drama.⁵

The extant writings attributed to Ephrem in Greek, Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian, Georgian, Arabic, Latin and Slavonic constitute a rich and significant body of materials. But the problem of sorting out his legacy to the universal church is complicated by the fact that his authentic writings in Syriac are scarcely represented in the vast body of writings ascribed to him in most of these other languages. There is a nearly complete mismatch between the texts considered by Syriac scholars to be authentic and those which survive in various other languages under Ephrem's name. The latter body of literature is interesting in itself and well deserves the attention it is just beginning to receive from scholars. It will probably not, however, tell us much about Ephrem himself and about the ways in which the 'historical Ephrem' so to speak, may have influenced Christians beyond the confines of the Syriac-speaking world. That actual influence is more likely to be found through the study of the theological themes and imagery traced through the homilists and hymnographers who postdate him in all these varied linguistic traditions. One aspect of his thought that is of enduring interest and continuous importance for all the orthodox traditions as well as for western Christian spirituality is the presence of God in the world.

EPHREM'S THEOLOGY OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN THE WORLD

Ephrem's world is permeated by the divine presence. His poetry is based upon a vision of the created order as a vast system of symbols or mysteries.⁶ No person, thing or event in the world exists without a mysterious relation to the whole. History and nature constitute the warp and woof of reality. To divorce an individual person, event or thing from its context in either direction would destroy the handiwork of God in time and space. Each moment of life is governed by the Lord of Life and is an opportunity to see oneself and the community in relation to that Lord. So all historical events must have profound religious significance, not just those described in scripture.

Nature, too, is replete with intimations of the presence of God. In creating the world, God deliberately presented us not only with examples of beauty and order but also with symbols that allude more richly to the identity of their Creator:

In every place, if you look, His symbol is there,
and when you read, you will find His prototypes.
For by Him were created all creatures,
and he imprinted His symbols upon His possessions.
When He created the world,
He gazed at it and adorned it with His images.
Streams of His symbols opened, flowed and poured forth
His symbols on its members.

(*Hymns on Virginity* 20.12)

At the centre of all is Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, who is at once the apex of history and the metaphysical Mediator between the ineffable Creator and the creation. Ephrem sets forth this notion most succinctly in the *Hymns on Virginity* 28–30, where he speaks of the three harps of God:

The Word of the Most High came down and put on
a weak body with hands,
and He took two harps [Old and New Testaments]
in His right and left hands.
The third [Nature] He set before Himself
to be a witness to the [other] two,
for the middle harp taught
that their Lord is playing them.

(*Virg.* 29.1)

This strophe shows clearly not only that scripture and nature play complementary roles in Ephrem's theology but also that the linchpin of his theological system is the Incarnate Word of God, through whom God has revealed the relation of the two Testaments to one another and to nature.

In examining his theology of divine presence, we will begin with his understanding of the Incarnation and proceed to the closely related notions of spiritual progress and sanctification or *theosis*/divinization. Next we will turn to God's presence in

history, first considering scripture as the record of salvation history, especially as understood through typological exegesis, and then addressing the sacred dimension of the rest of history, specifically the events which Ephrem himself witnessed and contemplated. Finally, we will consider nature as God's domain, first in human beings created in the divine image, then in the sacraments, and finally in the rest of the creation.

THE INCARNATION: LINCHPIN OF EPHREM'S THEOLOGY

A central theme of Ephrem's *Hymns on the Nativity* is the wonder of the Incarnation, conceived as a paradoxical entry of the ineffable, infinite and omnipotent God into the limitations of human life. It is a theological concept that evokes profound questions: for example, how can the Ruler of the Universe, whom the entire created order is unable to contain, have been contained in a single, small human womb?

The Power that governs all dwelt in a small womb.
While dwelling there, He was holding the reins of the universe.
His Parent was ready for His will to be fulfilled.
The heavens and all the creation were filled by Him.
The Sun entered the womb, and in the height and depth
His rays were dwelling.

(*Hymns on the Nativity* 21.6)

Not only the bare fact of the Incarnation but also its specific circumstances are miraculous and paradoxical: '[God] deprived the married womb: / He made fruitful the virgin womb' (*Hymns on the Nativity* 21.17). Far from showing a weakness, these apparent contradictions show the majesty of the Creator, the 'Lord of natures'.

Yet these are not pointless displays of might; instead they are the concessions of a loving God to human frailty:

God had seen that we worshiped creatures.
He put on a created body to catch us by our habit.
Behold by this fashioned one our Fashioner healed us,
and by this creature our Creator revived us.

(*Nat.*, 21.12)

Thus this miraculous and paradoxical self-abasement of God is clearly motivated by love for humankind. Ephrem often associates the language and imagery of divine compassion, mercy and maternal love with the Incarnation. Among his many epithets for Christ is *Ḥanânâ*, the Compassionate One, a title which he applies in virtually every moment in the life of Christ. The feast of the Incarnation, the Nativity, is the day on which 'the Compassionate One came out to sinners' (*Nat.* 4.23). Even before his birth, 'He dwelt [in Mary's womb] because of His compassion' (*Nat.* 21.8). The Compassionate One, he says, put on the garment of the body to rescue Adam:

He was wrapped in swaddling clothes . . .
He put on the garments of youth . . .
{and} the water of baptism . . .
{and} the linen garments in death:
All these {garments} are changes
that the Compassionate One first shed and then put on again
when He contrived to put on Adam the glory he had shed.
He entwined swaddling clothes with {Adam's} figleaves,
and he put on garments in place of his skins.
He was baptized for {Adam's} wrongdoing and embalmed for his death.
He rose and raised him up in glory.

(*Nat.* 23.12–13)

That same Compassionate One ‘bore our pain’ (*Nat.* 3.2). ‘He endured spitting and scourging, thorns and nails for our sake’ (*Nat.* 18.35).

Out of compassion and mercy, Christ freed human beings and all creation from the slavery of idolatry (*Nat.* 22.4–7). Ephrem relates this theme to the Roman tradition of temporarily releasing slaves for the Saturnalia:

The mercy of the High One was revealed,
and he came down to free His creation.
In this blessed month in which manumission takes place,
the Lord came to slavery to call the slaves to freedom.
Blessed is He Who brought manumission!

(*Nat.* 22.5)

Finally, Christians are expected to imitate the merciful condescension of their redeemer. Addressing Christ in his own voice, Ephrem says:

O [You] Greater than measure Who became immeasurably small,
from glorious splendor you humbled Yourself to ignominy.
Your indwelling mercy inclined You to all this.
Let Your compassion incline me to become praiseworthy in [spite of] my evil.

(*Nat.* 21.13)

The same is expected of all Christians since their baptism is a rebirth from the side of Christ, ‘the Compassionate One who . . . came to take up / the body that would be struck so that by the opening of his side / he might break through the way into Paradise’ (*Nat.* 8.4).

We are all expected to reciprocate, as Ephrem reminds his congregation once again on the feast of the nativity:

On this day on which God came into the presence of sinners, let not the just
man exalt himself in his mind over the sinner.
On this day on which the Lord of all came among servants, let the lords also
bow down to their servants lovingly.
On this day when the Rich One was made poor for our sake, let the rich man
also make the poor man a sharer at his table.
On this day a gift came out to us without our asking for it; let us then give
alms to those who cry out and beg from us.

This is the day when the high gate opened to us for our prayers; let us also open the gates to the seekers who have strayed but sought [forgiveness].

(*Nat.* 1.92–6)

Finally, Ephrem explicitly binds this imitation of Christ, the Compassionate One, to non-violent behaviour.

Glorious is the Compassionate One
Who did not use violence, and without force, by wisdom,
He was victorious. He gave a type to human beings
that by power and wisdom they might conquer discerningly.

(*Nat.* 8.5)

The divine condescension to humankind in the Incarnation has brought about a permanent change in the relationship between human beings and their Creator:

. . . the Deity imprinted Itself on humanity,
so that humanity might also be cut into the seal of the Deity.

(*Nat.* 1.99)

In addition to this language of seals and stamps, which he shares with the Logos theology of Greek Christianity, Ephrem expresses the intimate union of divine and human with the language of painting, likening it to the artist's blending of pigments:

Glorious is the Wise One Who allied and joined
Divinity with humanity,
One from the height and the other from below.
He mingled the natures like pigments,
and an image came into being: the God-man!

(*Nat.* 8.2)

The similarity of Ephrem's thought here to Athanasius' dictum, 'The Word of God became human so that we might become divine' has been noted.⁷ But the difference in Ephrem's view needs also to be stressed. For him the Incarnation not only opens up the way to *theosis* but it also brings a humanization of God. He explores the dimensions of that humanization of God especially through images of birth and suckling. In the Incarnation:

Christ entered [Mary's] womb a mighty warrior, and inside her womb He put
on fear.

He entered Nourisher of all and He acquired hunger.

He entered the One who gives drink to all, and He acquired thirst.

Stripped and laid bare, He emerged from [her womb] the One who clothes all.

(*Nat.* 11.8).

The image of the suckling child provides a radical image of divine love for humankind. To the infant Christ Ephrem says:

it is as if your love hungers for human beings
. . . what moves you so to bestow yourself
upon each who has seen you? . . .

Whence did it come to you so to hunger for human beings?

(*Nat.* 13.12–14)

On the one hand, the Son freely chose to become incarnate: ‘By His will He clothed himself with a body’ (*Nat.* 3.5). Yet this choice is clearly prompted by love, and it has the result that He became truly needy by this mingling of divinity with humanity:

Glorify to Him Who never needs us to thank Him.

Yet He [became] needy for He loves us, and He thirsted for He cherishes us.

And He asks us to give to Him so that He may give us even more.

His Fruit was mingled with our human nature

to draw us out toward Him Who bent down to us.

By the Fruit of the Root He will graft us onto His Tree.

(*Nat.* 3.17)

Perhaps the strongest image of the reciprocity which results from God’s condescension to us occurs in a context not of the Incarnation but rather in its figurative equivalent, God’s willingness to be clothed in human language; that is to say, the existence of revealed scripture.⁸ In this regard Ephrem characterizes the Deity as like a nursing mother or wet nurse:

Attuned to us is the Deity like a nursing mother to an infant,
watching the time for his benefits, knowing the time for weaning him,
both when to rear him on milk and when to feed him with solid food,
weighing and offering benefits according to the measure of his maturity.

(*Hymns on the Church* 25.18)⁹

This image of the Triune God pondering the right moment to move each human being from milk to solid food provides the perfect transition from Ephrem’s understanding of the Incarnation as a singular historical event, the culmination of the history of salvation, to his notion that it is an ongoing reality accessible to each human being according to the level of his or her spiritual advancement.

THE ONGOING, INDIVIDUALIZED PRESENCE OF GOD TO EACH HUMAN BEING

Although God’s grand concession to human frailty took place uniquely in the Incarnation, it also continues to take place in every time and place for each individual human being. God is revealed to each according to his or her capacity to perceive:

He was cheerful among the infants as a baby;

awesome was He among the Watchers¹⁰ as a commander.

Too awesome was He for John to loosen His sandals;

accessible was He for sinners who kissed His feet.

The Watchers as Watchers saw Him;

according to the degree of his knowledge each person saw Him.

Everyone according to the measure of his discernment
thus perceived Him, that One greater than all.

(*Nat.* 4.197–200)

The encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4)

For Ephrem Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4 is especially symbolic of the individualized relationship God conducts with each human being:

The glorious fount of Him Who was sitting
at the well as Giver of drink to all,
flows to each according to His will:
different springs according to those who drink.
From the well a single undifferentiated drink
came up each time for those who drank.
The Living Fount lets distinct blessings
flow to distinct people.

(*Hymns on Virginity* 23.3)

But, not satisfied merely to meet each of us at our present level of spiritual discernment, God leads each of us step by step to higher levels of understanding. Again, the Samaritan woman is paradigmatic of this process:

Because she in her love said, 'The Messiah will come,'
He revealed to her with love, 'I am He.'
That He was a prophet she believed already,
soon after, that He was the Messiah . . .
. . . she is a type of our humanity
that He leads step by step.

(*Virg.* 22.21)

Most ancient commentators on the story of the Samaritan woman saw her as an immoral woman, one who had been divorced many times or who had simply lived with several men without benefit of marriage. Dipping into the non-canonical books of the Old Testament, Ephrem found another solution to her having had five husbands and a sixth who was not really her husband: like Sarah in the Book of Tobit, she had been unlucky in marriage: all her husbands had died, so no man was brave enough to marry her. Thus her sixth husband did not share her marriage bed. This little detail is not only indicative of Ephrem's style of commentary (one that is narrative, literary and based on a broad familiarity with scripture), it is also significant that, having removed the cloud of opprobrium from over her head, Ephrem moves on to portray the Samaritan woman as an apostle, prophet and type of the *Theotokos*, the Mother of God. He praises her for her readiness to share her insight into Jesus' Messianic identity:

Blessed are you, O woman, for not suppressing
your judgement about what you discovered.

(*Virg.* 23.1.1–2)

Ephrem notes that just as Jesus' love for her led him to meet her need, her love for her neighbours led her to share her news with them:

The glorious Treasury was Himself present
for your need because of His love.
Your love was zealous
to share your treasure with your city.
Blessed woman, your discovery became
the Discoverer of the lost.

(*Virg.* 23.1.3–8)

Also laudable is the immediacy of her response to one small sign, to be contrasted with the obstinacy of those who refused to accept even the greater evidence of miracles.

In her revelation to others of what she had heard, she is like Mary who conceived by her ear and thereby brought the Son to the world:

[Praise] to you, o woman in whom I see
a wonder as great as in Mary!
For she from within her womb
in Bethlehem brought forth His body as a child,
but you by your mouth made Him manifest
as an adult in Shechem, the town of His father's household.
Blessed are you, woman, who brought forth by your mouth
light for those in darkness.
Mary, the thirsty land in Nazareth,
conceived our Lord by her ear.
You, too, O woman thirsting for water,
conceived the Son by your hearing.
Blessed are your ears that drank the source
that gave drink to the world.
Mary planted Him in the manger,
but you [planted him] in the ears of His hearers.

(*Virg.* 23.4–5)

Like the words of the prophets, what she spoke became reality:

Your word, O woman, became a mirror
in which He might see your hidden heart.
'The Messiah,' you had said, 'will come,
and when He comes, He will give us everything.'
Behold the Messiah for Whom you waited, modest woman!
Through your voice . . . prophecy was fulfilled.

(*Virg.* 23.6)

She is comparable to the apostles since even before the Twelve were permitted to do so, she preached the good news of salvation to the gentiles:

Your voice, O woman, first brought forth fruit,

even before the apostles [brought fruit] with their preaching.
The apostles were forbidden to announce Him
among pagans and Samaritans.
Blessed is your mouth that He opened and confirmed.
The Storehouse of life took and gave you to sow.
[Your] city, dead as Sheol,
You entered, and you revived your dead [land].

(*Virg.* 23.7)

SPIRITUAL PROGRESS AND SANCTIFICATION OR *THEOSIS*

Mary and the Beloved Disciple at the foot of the Cross (John 19:25–7)

Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the Beloved Disciple are also especially significant in Ephrem's understanding of the ongoing process of the Incarnation in sanctification or *theosis*, the full restoration in each human being of the lost *imago dei*. Mary and John (with whom the Beloved Disciple has often been identified) see in each other the complementary mysteries of God's condescending love for us and the bold access to divine love now open to human beings. Through them we, too, may see this twofold mystery of the Saviour. John and Mary, the mother of Jesus, are 'types' through whom we are able to see Christ as in a mirror while they themselves saw Him in one another. Ephrem begins by evoking the scene at the foot of the cross as it is portrayed in John's gospel, where Jesus invites Mary and John to regard one another as mother and son:

Blessed are you, O woman, whose Lord and son
entrusted you to one fashioned in His image.
The Son of your womb did not wrong your love,
but to the son of His bosom He entrusted you.
Upon your bosom you caressed Him when He was small,
and upon His bosom He also caressed [John],
so that when He was crucified
He repaid all you had advanced to Him,
the debt of His upbringing.
For, the Crucified repaid debts;
even yours was repaid by Him.
He drank from your breast visible milk,
but [John drank] from His bosom hidden mysteries.
Confidently He approached your breast;
confidently [John] approached and lay upon His bosom.
Since you missed the sound of His voice,
He gave you his harp
to be a consolation to you.

(*Virg.* 25.2–3)

The love and care which flowed from Mary to her Son are echoed by the love of Jesus for John and repaid by entrusting her to his care. John shows a special resemblance to Jesus, Ephrem assumes, because he takes his place as Mary's son. But a deeper ethical mystery is contained here: the love of John for his Lord led him to imitate him, thus bringing into higher relief in him the *imago dei* engraved on each human being:

The youth who loved our Lord very much,
who portrayed [and] put Him on and resembled Him,
was zealous in all these matters to resemble Him:
in his speech, his aspect and his ways.
The creature put on his Creator,
and he resembled Him although indeed he did not resemble what He was.
It is amazing how much the clay is able to be imprinted
with the beauty of its sculptor.

(*Virg.* 25.4)

By meditating on the relationship of Jesus to His mother, John was better able to understand the Incarnation:

The youth in the woman was seeing
how much that Exalted One was lowered,
how He entered [and] dwelt in a weak womb
and emerged [and] was suckled with weak milk.

(*Virg.* 25.8.1–4)

Meanwhile, by observing the behaviour of the Beloved Disciple Mary learned about the possibility of spiritual growth and the boldness it encourages:

The woman also wondered at how much he grew
that he went up and lay upon the bosom of God.
The two of them were amazed at one another,
how much they were able to grow by grace.
[It is] You, Lord, Whom they saw . . .
while observing one another:
Your mother saw You in Your disciple;
And he saw You in Your mother.

(*Virg.* 25.8.5–9.4)

Nor does the benefit of this insight stop with these two privileged and holy people, it extends to all who are willing to look deeply into their fellow human beings:

O the seers who at every moment
see You, Lord, in a mirror
manifest a type so that we, too, in one another
may see You, our Savior.

(*Virg.* 25.9.5–8)

Consecrated virginity

For Ephrem, thinking of the story of Martha and Mary, Mary Magdalen exemplifies perfectly the concentration on the inner presence of Christ which leads to the full restoration of the *imago dei*:

She turned her face away from everything
to gaze on one beauty alone.
Blessed is her love that was intoxicated, not sober,
so that she sat at His feet to gaze at Him.
Let you also portray the Messiah in your heart
and love Him in your mind.

(*Virg.* 24.7.3–8)

More broadly speaking, for Ephrem it is the consecrated virgin who has most fully stripped off the old Adam to put on the new at baptism. Her body is clothed in a new garment; it is the Temple of God and His royal Palace.

But however strongly Ephrem admonishes the virgin to preserve her sexual innocence, it is clear that this is not an end in itself, but rather it is symbolic of the full dedication of self to God which is the goal of every Christian life:¹¹

Let chastity be portrayed in your eyes and in your ears the sound of truth.
Imprint your tongue with the word of life and upon your hands [imprint] all
alms.
Stamp your footsteps with visiting the sick,
and let the image of your Lord be portrayed in your heart.
Tablets are honored because of the image of kings.
How much more will one be honored who has portrayed the Lord in all the
senses.

(*Virg.* 2.15)

BIBLICAL SYMBOLS AND THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN HISTORICAL EVENTS

Among the historical symbols, biblical typology plays the central role. The events in the history of Israel narrated in Hebrew scripture have religious significance for all people. Like most early Christian writers, however, Ephrem saw the Hebrew scripture as preliminary sketches, as shadows, when compared with the realities of the New Testament:

[Christ's] power perfected the types,
and His truth the mysteries,
His interpretation the similes,
His explanation the sayings,
and His assurances the difficulties.

By His sacrifice He abolished sacrifices,
and libations by His incense,
and the [passover] lambs by His slaughter,
the unleavened [bread] by His bread,
and the bitter [herbs] by His Passion.

By His healthy meal
He weaned [and] took away the milk.
By His baptism were abolished
the bathing and sprinkling
that the elders of the People taught.

(*Virg.* 8.8–10)

Despite the intrinsic importance of the events and persons of the 'Old Testament', they are only 'antitypes' which were fulfilled in the 'types' of the New Testament. On the one hand, the Passover Lamb is an anticipation of Christ and of the salvation gained through Him. To attempt to understand Christ without knowing about the Passover would be to deprive oneself of the depth and richness of meaning placed in human history by God Himself. Yet conversely, in Ephrem's view, to stop with the Passover Lamb rather than interpreting it as a symbol of Christ would mean missing the fullness of God's revelation and accepting a truncated version of the meaning of history.

Ephrem's hymns are permeated with typological exegesis. The central figures of this typology are Jesus and Mary. Ephrem presents a rich variety of Old Testament types for Christ. In the second of his Nativity Hymns he systematically presents Jesus as the prophet, priest and king. His selection of Old Testament figures as forerunners of Christ is similar to many other early Christian writers, but he adds unexpected interpretations as well. For example, Jesus is anticipated not only by Isaac, Melchizedek, Moses and David, but also by Jacob, who is kicked by Esau but does not retaliate.

Ephrem's Mariology is central to his understanding of the incarnation. Mary was chosen because she was most pleasing to God. Yet she who gave birth to the Son of the Most High was given birth by Him in baptism. Paradoxically, Mary gave birth to and nourished and cared for the Incarnate One who gave life, nourishment and care to her. In this she represents all humans and indeed all creation:

By power from Him Mary's womb became able
to bear the One Who bears all.
From the great treasury of all creation
Mary gave to Him every thing that she gave.
She gave Him milk from what He made exist.
She gave Him food from what He had created.
As God, He gave milk to Mary.
In turn, as human, He was given suck by her.

(*Nat.* 4.182–5)

Her theological importance is confirmed by the wealth of Ephrem's typology for Mary. She is not only the second Eve, but she is also a second Sarah, Rachel and

Anna; she is favourably compared and contrasted with Tamar, Ruth and Rahab (*Hymns on the Nativity* 8.13, 13.2–5, 9.7–16, 15.8 and 16.12). Most unusual is Ephrem's imagery drawn from the Jewish priestly cult to provide a typology for Mary's role. The virginity of Mary and of all the 'daughters of the covenant' is the vestment of the High Priest, who is Christ:

May all the evidences of virginity of Your brides
be preserved by You. They are the purple [robes]
and no one may touch them
except our King. For virginity
is like a vestment for You, the High Priest.

(*Nat.* 16.13)

Like the Ark of the Covenant, Mary is honoured not for herself but for the Divine presence within her:

Joseph rose
to serve in the presence of his Lord
Who was within Mary. The priest serves
in the presence of Your Ark because of Your holiness.

(*Nat.* 16.16)

The Tablets containing the teachings of the Mosaic Law also constitute an antitype which is fulfilled in Mary:

Moses bore the tablets of stone
that His Lord had written. And Joseph escorted
the pure tablet in whom was dwelling
the Son of the Creator. The tablets were left behind
since the world was filled with Your teaching.

(*Nat.* 16.17)

These unusual typologies are all based on the premise that in the Incarnation Mary became the dwelling place of God on earth.

To grasp more fully the significance for Ephrem of these metaphors one must be aware that in Syriac 'virginity' (*bethulutha*) is synonymous with 'chastity' (*qad-dishutha*), which also means 'holiness'. Behind the coincidence in meanings between 'chastity' and 'holiness' is ultimately a notion of mysterious power, untouchable sacral presence. Mary as the virgin *par excellence* is uniquely suited to be the holy one in whom – or perhaps better the holy place in which – God deigns to be present.

THE SACRED DIMENSION OF ALL OF HISTORY

All historical events have profound religious significance, not just those described in scripture. Ephrem's *Hymns against Julian*, along with the *Nisibene Hymns*, display his kinship with the Jewish prophets. Like them, he contemplates the political and military events of his time in the light of his ethical and theological tenets, looking for evidence of divine activity, rewards, punishments and edifying moral lessons.

Living as he did in an area at the Easternmost edge of the Roman empire constantly under the pressure of Sassanid Persia, Ephrem was presented with dramatic historical events for his contemplation. When the Persian army besieged his town of Nisibis for the third time and it was spared even after its protecting city wall had been broken down, he composed poetry about salvation and grace:

[God] saved us without a wall and taught that He is our wall.
He saved us without a king and made known that He is our king.
He saved us in all from all and showed He is all.
He saved us by His grace and again revealed
that He is freely gracious and life-giving. From each who boasts
He takes away the boast and gives to him His grace.

(*Nisibene Hymns* 2.2)

Warnings against idolatry and encouragement in adversity are as prominent in his hymns as in the pronouncements of Jeremiah and Isaiah. When the apostate Roman emperor Julian brought his army into Mesopotamia, ostentatiously offering sacrifice to the old pagan deities, pressuring the Christians of Mesopotamia to join in that worship, but finally dying in battle (in June 363 CE), Ephrem was not at a loss for words. He elaborated the view that God had made the apostate emperor Julian the representative and symbol of all who hold erroneous views – not only pagans but also heretics and Jews. His defeat was a sign to all nations of the ultimate fate of those who oppose God.

The first of Ephrem's five *Hymns against Julian* stands apart from the rest since it was written prior to the emperor's death in battle. Here the poet offers a message of hope and perseverance to the people of Nisibis, threatened with persecution. The other four hymns reiterate and develop that message in the light of subsequent events. Rather than focusing on the loss of their city to the Persians, a catastrophe caused by Nisibene acquiescence to Julian's re-establishment of paganism there, Ephrem emphasizes that the claims of paganism have been proved false by the fate of the apostate emperor. The political events provide a larger-than-life drama of the cosmic conflict between good and evil. God's partisans, the true members of the church of Nisibis, with the encouragement of the watching angels, withstood the onslaughts of Satan in the form of imperial persecution and Persian military attacks.

Using a favourite metaphor, the mirror as the instrument of Divine ethical lessons, Ephrem takes the apostate emperor as the model of human pride as well as of political promotion of religious error. His policies unmasked the false Christians within the church; his ignominious death demonstrates the folly of his pride as well as the falsity of his beliefs. The divine purpose in the defeat and death of the Roman emperor was to present to all people a model of the vanity of idolatry. At the same time the fidelity of Christians has been tested and many have been found wanting during the pagan emperor's brief reign. Weak or false Christians have returned openly to paganism, or they have attacked their Creator in the contentious error of the Arian heresy. The Jewish people, he contends, have also returned to idolatrous worship. On the other hand, the city of Nisibis presents, again as if in a mirror, a model for fidelity to God, its rewards, and the consequences of its lapse. Reinforcing

this primary imagery is the symbol of the church as the true vine, beneficially pruned by the rigours of persecution:

Rely on the truth, my brothers, and be not afraid
for our Lord is not so weak as to fail us in the test.
He is the power on which the world and its inhabitants depend.
The hope of His Church depends on Him.
Who is able to sever its heavenly roots?

(*Hymns against Julian* 1.1)

Although the branch is living, on it are dead fruits
blooming only outwardly.
The wind tried them and cast off the wild grapes.

(*Jul.* 1.5)

Several other metaphors serve to teach the same lesson: separation of the wheat from the tares, the purification of gold in the furnace, and separation of the curds and whey in cheesemaking (*Jul.* 1.10–13, 2.10–11; 1.13, 2.24, 4.1; 4.2).

To these symbols current in both biblical and general Hellenistic contexts, Ephrem adds biblical examples of faithless sovereigns and the consequences of their erroneous ways: Nebuchadnezzar, Jeroboam, Ahab, Jotham, Manasseh, Jezebel, Athaliah and Saul provide precedents for Julian's errors as well as his fate (*Jul.* 1.8, 1.20, 2.2, 4.5, 4.8). The attendant notions of true and false prophecy provide a context for his contention that in this case the church has followed the course of Daniel, confronting the pagan ruler, whereas the Jewish people have followed the precedent of the Israelites under Jeroboam, worshipping the golden calf (*Jul.* 1.16–20, 2.2). While this general approach, aptly named 'prophetic anti-Judaism' by Ruether (1974: 117–82), is typical of patristic writers, Ephrem pursues his view with tenacious originality, accompanied, one suspects, by a modicum of perverse misrepresentation. In support of the parallel with the Israelite worship of the golden calf, for example, he associates Julian's bull coinage with his attempt to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem as well as claiming that the music and sacrifice of traditional Jewish worship resemble pagan worship in its raucousness. Likewise to the established argument that Daniel prophesied the permanent destruction of the Jewish Temple, he adds the claim implicit in Constantine's building programme but not generally stated in theological polemics that Christian pilgrimage functions as a substitute for the Jewish cult of Jerusalem (*Jul.* 4.23–5).

Throughout these hymns, he exploits an extensive variety of animal imagery. The Orphic and broadly Hellenistic notion of a philanthropic shepherd king, already well-established as a model for Christ, is presented as a foil for Julian, the bad king (*Jul.* 1.1–2). Rather than a good shepherd, he is a wolf in sheep's clothing, or a he-goat, favouring the goats rather than the sheep (*Jul.* 2.1–4). The latter image has the added punch of alluding to Julian's unpopular beard as well as intimating lasciviousness (*Jul.* 2.6–9). Ephrem's almost apocalyptic description of the conflict between the forces of good and evil is enhanced by his association of the pagans with vermin, dragons and the primal chaos as well as with the more mundane insults of association with hogs and filth (*Jul.* 1.3, 1.5, 2.13).

Finally, Ephrem's symbolic imagination provides several examples of the ironic outcome of Julian's efforts. Considering it suitable that 'the punishment should fit the crime', he finds numerous coincidences to confirm this view. For example, the emperor's death near Babylon in conjunction with his 'denial' of Daniel's prophecy cements the parallel of Julian with Nebuchadnezzar (*Jul.* 1.18–20). Moreover, Ephrem spins out in elaborate detail the inherent contradiction of Julian's attempt to use Chaldean religion to defeat Persians, and the paradox that he was misled by the oracles to become himself the sacrificial goat (*Jul.* 2.4–25, 4.5–14). The coincidental features of his uncle Julian's fate should have astonished the emperor as they did Ephrem (*Jul.* 4.3). Likewise laden with significance is the similarity of Julian's death by a lance to the death of his sacrificial animals, both of which are implicitly contrasted with the death of the True Lamb who, being pierced, released humankind from the curse of the lance that barred the gate to Paradise (*Jul.* 3.14).

After the death of Julian, the Roman army had chosen a new emperor, Jovian, an orthodox Christian. Seeing no alternative to surrender under the disadvantageous terms offered him by Shapur, Jovian accepted them. These terms included cession to Persia of the city of Nisibis without its inhabitants. The city was, in Ephrem's eyes, the sacrificial lamb that saved the Roman army (*Jul.* 2.15.6). Unlike Ammianus Marcellinus, however, who portrays the fate of Nisibis in exclusively negative terms, Ephrem stresses that, although the city itself was ceded to Persia, the Persian ruler showed respect for its Christian churches and permitted its citizens to depart for Roman territory rather than executing them, enslaving them or exiling them into the Eastern reaches of the Persian empire, as had been the fate of the inhabitants of other recalcitrant Mesopotamian cities (*Jul.* 2.22–7). To celebrate his victory and show appropriate disdain for the religion of the Roman army that had attacked his empire, the Persian king was apparently satisfied to destroy the pagan temples associated specifically with Julian (*Jul.* 2.22). Still, the entire Christian population of this fortress city migrated within a short time to the adjacent cities of the Roman empire. Ephrem was among those who went to first to Amida, then to Edessa, where he would spend his last ten years. Thus the heroic struggle of his native city, a symbol of Rome and of Christianity, against the mighty Persian empire, a struggle which had occupied most of his adult life, ended in defeat and disgrace. The 'constant, unwearied herald' was surrendered to the Persians (*Jul.* 2.16.6). As he meditates on these events in his *Nisibene Hymns* and in his *Hymns against Julian*, Ephrem again shows himself to be a genuine heir to the Jewish prophetic tradition, interpreting historical events as directed by divine Providence towards the attainment of justice in this world.¹² There must be a reason for God's allowing Nisibis to be taken. For him that reason is clear: the apostasy of the Christian Roman emperor and of those who followed him in reinstating pagan worship:

Who else has so multiplied altars?
Who else has so honored all the evil spirits?
Who else has so pleased all the demons?
He angered only the One, and he was broken.
In him was confuted the entire faction of wrong,
a force unable to support its worshipers!

(*Jul.* 4.6)

HUMAN BEINGS IN THE DIVINE IMAGE AND DIVINE PRESENCE IN ALL OF NATURE

Ephrem's emphasis on the Incarnation and his extension of that historical moment into the process of sanctification show clearly that human beings have a special place in the created order:

Blessed is He Who engraved our soul and adorned and betrothed her to Him[self].

Blessed is He Who made our body a Tabernacle for His hiddenness.

Blessed is He Who with our tongue interpreted His secrets.

Let us give thanks to that Voice Whose praise on our lyre
and Whose power on our kithara are sung.

(Nat. 3.7.1–5)

He is He Who Himself constructed the senses of our minds
so that we might sing on our lyre something that the mouth of the bird
is unable to sing in its melodies.

Glory to the One Who saw that we had been pleased
to resemble the animals in our rage and greed,
and [so] He descended and became one of us that we might become heavenly.

(Nat. 3.16)

Although it is clear that human beings, with the *imago dei*, enjoy a unique position in the world, certain material things enjoy a privileged place since they link the world of nature to the world of scripture. That privileged place is rooted in nature, in their physical properties and their names. So oil is symbolic of Christ and the salvation brought by Him, not only because He is literally, 'the Anointed One' Who fulfils the roles of priest, prophet and king, but also due to the natural properties of oil: its healing and strengthening properties, its capacity to provide light, its use with pigments for painting an image, its ability to ease forces in conflict, and even its property of floating on water, as Jesus walked on the water (*Virg.* 4–7)! All these properties resonate in the baptismal anointing in which the *imago dei* is restored to us:

The lamp returned our lost things, and the Anointed also [returned] our treasures.

The lamp found the coin, and the Anointed [found] the image of Adam.

(*Virg.* 5.8.5–6)

The bread and wine of the Eucharist, although they provide a less fertile field for Ephrem's imagination, play a similar role:¹³

Blessed is the Shepherd Who became the sheep for our absolution.

Blessed is the Vineshoot that became the cup of our salvation.

Blessed also is the Cluster, the source of the medicine of life.

Blessed also is the Ploughman Who Himself became
the grain of wheat that was sown and the sheaf that was reaped.

He is the Master Builder Who became a tower for our refuge.

(Nat. 3.15)

Not only the elements of the sacraments, however, but other material things and concepts are symbolic of Christ. So Satan's temptations of Jesus have ironic appropriateness: he tempted with bread the 'Sustainer of all', with stones, 'the perfect Stone', with kingship the true King (*Virg.* 14). Even things without a symbolic tradition in scripture may be seen as representative of Christ's altruistic suffering. In one of his *Virginity* hymns he considers a long series of minerals, plants and animals all worked by human craft on our behalf despite the harm done to them. Like a Buddhist or Manichaean sage, Ephrem notes that they all suffer for our benefit, making them symbolic of Christ, as the following excerpt from the list shows:

Iron and a sharp stake, indeed, pierce the pearl
like that One Who was pierced by nails and on the cross.
It becomes by its suffering an adornment for humankind.

When a fruit is eaten, by means of its suffering its taste
pours out in the mouth. This is a symbol of that Fruit
that brings to life His eaters when His body is eaten.

The sheep in its shame strips off its garment and cloak
and gives all of it to its shearers,
like the Lamb Who divided His garments for His crucifiers.

All these things teach by their symbols:
they open by their sufferings the treasure of their riches,
and the suffering of the Son of the Gracious One is the key of His treasures.

(*Hymns on Virginity* 11.9, 12, 17, 20)

Finally, every beauty of daily life is a tangible reminder of the graciousness of God:

But remaining are all those things the Gracious One made in His mercy.
Let us see those things that He does for us every day!
How many tastes for the mouth! How many beauties for the eye!
How many melodies for the ear! How many scents for the nostrils!
Who can be compared to the goodness of these little things!

(*Virg.* 31.16)

NOTES

- 1 Some segments of this chapter have appeared previously in the general introduction, introductions to individual hymns and notes to McVey (1989).
- 2 For a more detailed account of Ephrem's life, see McVey (1989: 5–28). In addition to allusions within Ephrem's genuine literary corpus, ancient sources for Ephrem's life include Sozomen, *Church History* 3.16; Palladius, *Lausiac History* 40; Jerome, *On Illustrious Men* 115; Theodoret, *Church History* 4.26; a Syriac *vita* tradition; and a Syriac homily

- by Jacob of Sarug. For a concise overview of these materials and the recent scholarship, cf. Sebastian Brock (1999).
- 3 On Ephrem's use of Greek philosophical concepts, see Possekkel (1999).
 - 4 On the corpus of translations and their authenticity, see McVey (1989: 4, n. 6). Further, see the excellent collection of conference papers (published as Palmer 1998, 1999).
 - 5 For bibliography on this subject, see McVey (1989: 5, n. 7).
 - 6 On Ephrem's use of symbols, see Bou Mansour (1988).
 - 7 Observed by Brock (1990a: 72–4), with regard to *Hymns on Faith* 5.17; with regard to *Hymns on the Nativity* 1.99, in McVey (1989: 74, n. 66).
 - 8 Brock characterizes this as another sort of 'incarnation' of the Word (1990a: 45–9).
 - 9 The translation is Brock's (1990b).
 - 10 On 'Watchers', a class of angels often mentioned by Ephrem, see McVey (1989: 229, n. 36).
 - 11 On Ephrem's understanding of virginity and of 'singleness' in the context of early Syriac tradition, see Koonammakal (1999).
 - 12 See Martikainen (1974) and Griffith (1987).
 - 13 For example, see *Hymns on Virginity* 16.2.4.5 and 31.13–14. Further on Ephrem's understanding of the Eucharist, see Yousif (1984).

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JULIAN THE APOSTATE



Michael Bland Simmons

In this chapter I offer a profile of a man whose ambition, if it had been realized, would probably have meant this volume would never have been written. Whereas the other profiles which precede this speak of men and women whose lives contributed to the establishment of Christianity in its first few centuries, Julian lived the last years of his short life determined upon restraining it in favour of a resurgence of pagan religion.

Flavius Claudius Julianus (c. 331–63 CE) was born at Constantinople. His grandfather was Constantius Chlorus, a member of Diocletian's Tetrarchy, and his uncle was Constantine.¹ After Constantine's death in 337, his son Constantius II may have ordered the execution of Julian's father, Julius Constantius, and several of his male relatives. During this period Constantius II was ruling the Eastern provinces of the empire. Julian's mother Basilina died when he was an infant, and her family assumed the responsibility of the young orphan and his half-brother Gallus, who was five years his senior. Basilinas' former Scythian tutor, Mardonius, taught Julian in Nicomedia, and inculcated in him a great reverence for Greek culture. Eusebius the Arian bishop of the same city was his principal teacher.² It was during these formative years of his life that the basic attributes of Julian's disposition were being developed. Our sources inform us that he was eloquent, studious, shy, often inconsistent, very talkative, prone to nervousness, sexually chaste, extremely superstitious, and loved the applause of the masses.³

In 342 Constantius II sent Gallus and Julian to Macellum in central Turkey where they lived for six years.⁴ Julian received a good education in Christian literature, including the scriptures, and we are told that eunuchs were assigned to prevent his wavering from the faith.⁵ His love of Hellenism, which had been inspired by Mardonius, continued to develop from his studies in Greek literature. It would be unreasonable to question the sincerity of his faith at this time, or the assertion that he became a reader in the church at Nicomedia.⁶ Indeed, Christian writers of the period lament the emperor who had once been a dedicated Christian, and pagans confirm his apostasy from a genuine faith.⁷

Constantius II recalled Gallus and Julian from Macellum in 348 to the capital. Julian studied rhetoric there and at Nicomedia until 351, often attending the lectures of Libanius, who became his life-long friend and dedicated several orations

to him after he became emperor (Sozomen, *H. E.* 5.2; Smith 1995: 2). It was also during this time (348–51) that Julian met Maximus of Ephesus, who exerted a significant philosophical and religious (especially mystical) influence on the young man, and played a role in Julian's apostasy.⁸ Constantius II appointed Gallus Caesar in 351, and Julian was given freedom to continue his studies in western Asia Minor at Pergamum and Ephesus under the Neoplatonic philosophers Aedesius, the disciple of Iamblichus, Eusebius, and Chrysanthius, in addition to Maximus (Bowersock 1978: 28–30; Smith 1995: 2–4). The Iamblichean Neoplatonism espoused by these profoundly impacted his intellectual and spiritual development. Writing from Gaul in 358–9 to his fellow Neoplatonist Priscus, Julian referred to Iamblichus as a god-like man ranking next to Plato and Pythagoras.⁹ Neoplatonism by this time was characterized by a combination of religious philosophy and a mystical experience often referred to as theurgy. The latter was associated with the Chaldean theology and oracles which also had a significant influence on Porphyry. In 351 Julian had made the decision to apostasize from Christianity, and he was initiated into the Chaldean theurgical rites by Maximus of Ephesus. From then on, Maximus continued to have a great influence on Julian, persuaded him to convert to paganism, and was a moving force behind Julian's later attempts to revive Hellenism in the Eastern provinces.¹⁰ He was by his side when the emperor died during the Persian campaign in 363 (see p. 1259). Julian continued his studies in Asia Minor until Constantius II ordered the execution of Gallus for treason in 354, at which time the younger brother was summoned to the imperial court at Milan. He was saved from execution on the charge of complicity by the intervention of the empress Eusebia.¹¹ The following year (355) Julian went to Athens to study, and here he met the great Cappadocian father, St Basil.¹² It proved to be a short stay because Constantius II summoned him to Milan and appointed him Caesar on 6 November (Sozomen, *H. E.* 3.1; 5.2; Socrates, *H. E.* 2.34; Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 476). By December he was dispatched to Gaul to begin a campaign against the Germanic tribes.¹³ After Julian's decisive victory over the Goths at Strasbourg in 357, Constantius II became increasingly suspicious of his growing power¹⁴ and eventually ordered the bulk of Julian's army to be transferred to the East to help in the Persian campaign against Shapur II (Ammianus Marcellinus 20.4.1–2; Libanius, *Or.* 28.92–117). Receiving the imperial order in Paris early in 360, Julian's army mutinied and at once proclaimed their general the new emperor (Ammianus Marcellinus 20.4.14). By the next year (361) both armies were preparing for war, but Constantius II became ill and died in November. Now recognized as the sole emperor, Julian and his troops entered Constantinople in December.¹⁵

One of his first acts as emperor was the promulgation of an Edict on Religious Toleration which provided for the raising of temples, construction of altars, the restoration of sacrifices, and the reorganization of the pagan priesthood.¹⁶ The major objective of this legislation was to promote the cultural revival of the Eastern cities on the basis of Hellenic *paideia* (Libanius, *Or.* 15.67; 18.23, 161). Libanius tells us that Julian very zealously participated in the programme. He sacrificed animals at dawn and at dusk, and turned his imperial gardens and palace into a pagan temple (Libanius, *Or.* 12.80–2, 17.4; Socrates, *H. E.* 3.17). His fingers were stained red by the blood of so many sacrificed animals (Libanius, *Or.* 12.82). Julian moved quickly

to reform the court at Constantinople (Socrates, *H. E.* 3.1; Ammianus Marcellinus 22.5.1–5). After expelling a large surplus of barbers, eunuchs and cooks from the palace, he turned to reducing the number of secretaries in the civil service. He also restricted the mode of imperial transportation and the conveyance of necessities (Socrates, *H. E.* 3.1). Gregory of Nazianzus interpreted these actions as an attempt to eliminate Christians who had served under Constantius II.¹⁷ Although he was careful not to begin an official state persecution of the Christians for fear that this would produce martyrs,¹⁸ Julian none the less systematically began to move against the religion that had been favoured since the conversion of Constantine.¹⁹

Early in his reign Julian recalled the bishops who had been exiled by Constantius II, which appeared to be an act of benevolence, but the true motives were most probably to cause internal dissension in the Eastern churches.²⁰ This interpretation is tenable in light of legislation which deprived Christian clergy of the immunities, honours, and provisions granted by Constantine (Theodoret, *H. E.* 3.3; Lieu 1986: 40–6). We must remember that Julian was familiar with the internal disputes of the Christians and could therefore distinguish between orthodox, Arian, and heretical (e.g., gnostic) believers (Julian, *Ep.* 40, to Hecebolus in later 362/early 363 from Antioch). Widows of clergy had to pay back money formerly supplied by imperial funds (Sozomen, *H. E.* 5.5). The emperor publicly ridiculed Christian bishops.²¹ We are told that he refused to receive Christian embassies, did not send military aid to the Christian city Nisibis during the Persian invasion, and made another Christian city, Constantia, a tributary of the pagan stronghold Gaza. Christians in Caesarea in Cappadocia were heavily taxed (Sozomen, *HE* 5.3, 4; Balty 1974; Fowden 1978). Even though the emperor did not overtly persecute the Christians, he attempted to make it as difficult as possible for them, especially in the Eastern provinces.²²

Martyrdom, however, did occur, sometimes tolerated by the emperor himself. At Palestinian Askalon and Gaza, Christian priests and virgins were tortured and executed, while at Sebaste a martyr's bones were burned and scattered.²³ Open persecutions (including executions) of Christians broke out at Heliopolis and Emesa in Phoenicia, in the Thracian city of Dorystolum, and Arethusa in Syria (Theodoret, *H. E.* 3.3; Sozomen, *H. E.* 5.10). Sozomen informs us that Eusebius, Nestabus, and Zeno became martyrs at Gaza, and unlike bishop George's murder at Alexandria, which was met with a letter of rebuke from the emperor, Julian's only response was to depose the governor of the province (Sozomen, *H. E.* 5.9).

In addition to a change in imperial policies towards the newly favoured religion of the empire, one of the major goals of Julian was to bring about the revival of paganism in the urban centres of the East. The heart of his programme was expressed in the ancient ideal of Greek *paideia*, which included all the elements of high culture from literature, art, drama, music, and the art of government, to science, philosophy, and religion. Julian perceived Greek *paideia* to be a synthesis of the outstanding attributes of Hellenism combined with *Romanitas*, which collectively revealed salvation to humanity and civilization to the world because it had been the product of divine revelation.²⁴ While its spiritual legacy was soteriological and revelatory, in a political and civic sense it was the only hope for the restoration of the former greatness of the empire which began to diminish with the rise of the Galilean superstition.²⁵ In light of this conviction to resurrect the old cults of the cities, it

should not surprise us that Julian set out to reorganize paganism, often in the midst of pagan apathy towards the gods (see Julian, *Ep.* 20), according to the structure and practices of the church. For example, high priests were appointed over areas with the authority to appoint priests in every city and assign them various responsibilities (Julian, *Ep.* 20). Writing to Arsacius, the high priest of Galatia, Julian demanded a higher ethical standard for all priests. They must not enter theatres, he advises, drink in taverns, nor involve themselves in disreputable trade (Julian, *Ep.* 22). In another epistle he laments that the Galilean folly has 'overturned almost everything' (Julian, *Ep.* 37). After ordering a high priest to make provisions in every city to help the poor, Julian adds that the Galileans are helping not only their own poor, but 'ours' as well (Julian, *Ep.* 22). He commands priests to be benevolent towards humanity because this was the practice of the ancient Hellenic religion.²⁶

Julian systematically continued to move against the Christians by the implementation of new legislation. The edict of 17 June 362 which forbade Christian teachers to teach classical literature in the schools was considered a harsh measure even by the pagan historian Ammianus Marcellinus (25.4.20; Banchich 1993; Averil Cameron 1993: 4). The rescript issued later directed provincial magistrates to exclude Christians from educational employment (Julian, *Ep.* 36, after 17 June 362, at Antioch; Hardy 1968: 131). Julian defines the Galilean religion as a mental disease, and emphasizes that literary culture has been revealed to civilization by the gods through men like Homer, Hesiod, Demosthenes and Herodotus (*Ep.* 36). Christian theologians had for many years been using classical works to show how it served God's plan as a preparation for the definitive revelation in Christ. Julian's concept of *paideia*, based on the religious *mos maiorum* of ancient polytheism, affirmed the superiority of Graeco-Roman culture to the man-made myths of the Galileans. The edict therefore had a twofold purpose: it aimed at reviving Hellenism in the cities, and it was a part of imperial policies related to Christianity which were becoming increasingly antagonistic.²⁷

Julian moved his court to Antioch during July 362 to prepare for his Persian campaign that began in March of the following year (Ammianus Marcellinus 22.9.15; Sozomen, *H. E.* 5.19). The emperor soon alienated the ruling classes because of his ascetic life, interest in reviving paganism in a Christianized metropolis, reluctance to support the chariot races, and a serious conflict with the Antiochene curia concerning the proper solution to economic problems (Socrates, *H. E.* 3.17; Athanassiadi 1992: 216). The latter was the main cause of discontent among the citizens of the city (Libanius, *Or.* 15.8–19; Socrates, *H. E.* 3.1). When the emperor arrived in the city, food shortages had already occurred. Libanius tells us that an edict reducing the price of food coincided with a severe drought. Vendors left the city, famine ensued, accompanied by scarcity, and the Antiochenes blamed everything on Julian (Socrates, *H. E.* 3.1; Sozomen, *H. E.* 5.19; Libanius, *Or.* 15.8, 19, 21, 70; 18.195–6, 148). Having now become unpopular, he was constantly ridiculed by the people, yet it was during this period that many of his extant works were written (Smith 1995: 7–9). Within this situation of growing hostility Julian's anti-Christian posture was reinforced. During the winter of 362–3 he was doing research for his *Contra Galilaeos*. According to Theodoret an edict was issued at this time which expelled Christians from the army (*H. E.* 3.4). Whether this is true is

rather unlikely, owing to the fact that since Diocletian the number of Christians in the military had increased, and Julian needed a large army for his Persian campaign. On 29 January 363, however, we hear that a number of Christians who served in the army were executed (Woods 1997; Jones 1963: 24–5). Other policies against the Christians were the edict forbidding daytime funerals (Julian, *Ep.* 56), in a context where pagan funerals occurred at night; and the support of pagan intellectuals in the East to revive the imperial cult by sacrificing to Julian (Libanius, *Or.* 15–36). Although scholars continue to debate the precise meaning of Julian's actions at this time, it is clear that the growing hostility towards the Christians from June 362 to March 363, and the concomitant favouritism shown to pagans, strongly indicates a movement of imperial policies towards an increasingly overt anti-Christian programme. And this appears to have been a driving force in Julian beginning at least with the death of Constantius II.²⁸

Other significant events occurred while he resided at Antioch. Before launching the Persian campaign the emperor consulted the oracle of Daphne which was located about six kilometres south-east of Antioch (Lieu 1986: 51–7). Desiring to restore the shrine's Castalian springs which were believed to possess prophetic powers, Julian invoked the deity, who ordered that the bodies buried nearby be removed to another place.²⁹ Julian interpreted this to mean that the remains of St. Babylas, bishop of Antioch who was martyred during the Decian persecution, and who was buried close to the shrine, must be relocated. On 22 October 362 the temple of Apollo at Daphne, along with the cultic statue, was destroyed by fire.³⁰ Accusing the Christians of starting the fire, Julian retaliated by ordering the great church in Antioch to be closed (Theodoret, *H. E.* 3.6). Fresh persecutions against the Christians began under the leadership of the emperor's uncle Julian (Lieu 1986: 51–7).

Under Iamblichus Neoplatonism had evolved into a syncretistic system comprising metaphysics, ethics, and Chaldean theurgical rites (Simmons 1995: 216–303). This new religious philosophy was characterized by a strong belief in divine revelation (oracles) thought capable of giving to the recipient guidance for one's decisions, wisdom in the affairs of life, and even glimpses into the future. With respect to the history of religion in the ancient Mediterranean world, Julian the Apostate is very significant for our understanding of this mystical belief in 'personal prophecy'. Pagan and Christian sources inform us that early in his life Julian became obsessed with an interest in augury, sorcery, enchantments, dreams and visions, divination, extispicy, oracles, soothsaying, necromancy, horoscopes, prodigies, zodiac signs, seeking out seers, all kinds of omens, and many other prophetic 'signs' (Julian, *Ep.* 6; Libanius, *Or.* 12. 69; 13.14, 48–9; 15.53; Ephrem's *Hymn against Julian*, *passim*). Indeed he offers to students of ancient religions, particularly those interested in 'prophetic revelation', a gold mine of information. For example, Julian tells us that the foundation of the Roman empire consists of the body of ancestral religious customs passed down from antiquity, the *mos maiorum*, which beginning in the Regal period (753–510 BC) came about by divine revelation. Under king Numa great blessings occurred because the Sibyl and others experienced 'divine possession' and 'inspiration' and gave oracles for the city from Zeus (Julian, *Contra Galilaeos* 194B; *Ep.* 20). By placing this concept of *Sacred History* in contradistinction with the Christian 'fulfilment from prophecy' argument, Julian aimed at dismantling a

powerful weapon in traditional Christian apologetics to show that the Christian interpretation of Old Testament prophecies about Jesus was untenable (Julian, *Contra Galilaeos* 106C, 138C). But it was not just an academic argument. Owing to his strong belief that prophecy was a 'blessed gift' from the gods (*Contra Galilaeos* 106C), the extent to which it influenced both his personal affairs and, more importantly, his decisions as emperor should not be overlooked. Often prophecies, meaning here all means of acquiring important information from the gods, directly affected governmental appointments and military decisions (Ammianus Marcellinus 22.12.6–7; Libanius, *Or.* 18.180; Julian, *Ep.* 9). By prophecy Julian knew when people would die, including himself (Ammianus Marcellinus 22.1.2; Sozomen, *H. E.* 5.1; Eunapius, *Philos.* 475–6; Averil Cameron 1993: 91). Even though he alludes to the rare manifestation of the prophetic spirit in his own day, he stresses that it has altogether ceased amongst the Hebrews and Egyptians, and finds comfort in the 'sacred arts' of divination through which heaven can aid man now.³¹ And if it was rare, oracular revelation did continue at a few temples of Apollo, and the incident at Daphne proves how zealously Julian sought out divine oracles.³² Finally, Julian was significantly influenced by dreams and visions, and kept in his imperial entourage a group of experts who were adept at their interpretation (Ammianus Marcellinus 23.3.3; 25.2.3–4, 25.3.9; Julian, *Ep.* 4).

Julian's keen interest in prophetic revelation may shed some light on the edict which he issued at Antioch, probably late in 362, that ordered the rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem. A former vice-prefect of Britain, Alypius, was appointed to supervise the project, but shortly after it began an earthquake and a fire brought about its termination (Ammianus Marcellinus 23.1.2–3; Seaver 1978). Scholars have given several reasons for Julian's motives. First, he wanted to rebuild the temple as a part of his programmeme to revive animal sacrifices (Blanchetière 1980; Athanassiadi 1992: 164). Second, it was a part of his anti-Christian policies (Klein 1986: 287; Smith 1995: 193). Finally, Julian wanted to disprove Christ's prophecy of Matthew 24.2, Mark 13.2 and Luke 21.6 which predicted the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple (Browning 1976: 176; Bowerstock 1978: 89–90; Potter 1994: 171). One other motive that has never been investigated concerns an oracle, undoubtedly derived from Porphyry's *Philosophia ex oraculis*, and quoted by Augustine in the *De Civitate Dei*:

For when they saw that it could not be destroyed by all those many great persecutions but rather increased amazingly because of them, they thought up some Greek verses or other, as if they were the outpouring of a divine oracle in reply to some one consulting it; in them they make Christ blameless, to be sure, of this charge of sacrilege (so to call it), but explain that Peter contrived by sorcery that the name of Christ should be worshipped for three hundred and sixty-five years, and then after the completion of that number of years it should immediately come to an end.

(*Civ. Dei* 18.53)

The important elements of this prophecy are: (1) a pagan god gives 'prophetic revelation'; (2) it is a futuristic prophecy containing a specific date; and (3) it predicts the termination of Christianity exactly 365 years after Christ began to be

worshipped. At least five data strongly suggest that the oracle derives from Porphyry's *Philosophia ex oraculis*: (1) The oracle was in a collection of Greek verses; (2) oracular revelation was given after someone inquired about Christianity; (3) the many 'Great Persecutions' are now in the past; (4) Christ is not criticized; and (5) Peter is a magician. During the winter of 362–3 Julian was doing research for the *Contra Galilaeos* (Lib., Or. 18.178) which he finished before March 363. While writing the work, it is highly possible that Porphyry's anti-Christian books were consulted, and the above oracle was discovered. Realizing that he could be instrumental in the fulfilment of the prophecy, Julian called a conference with Jewish officials which resulted in the Edict on Rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. Moreover, he will have perceived both the fulfilment of the prophecy and the rebuilding of the Temple as interrelated events that could bring about the realization of his dream to revive Hellenism. As a fervent anti-Christian, Julian will have viewed the rebuilding of the Temple as a historical confirmation of Porphyry's oracle and the crowning event of his imperial career. A comforting thought in his twilight years would have been that the gods used him to fulfil the prophecy given by a prominent Neoplatonic philosopher about the demise of a religion for which they possessed a mutual hatred. We may also give the following data to support this interpretation:

- 1 Even by pagan accounts Julian was very superstitious and possessed a fanatical interest in oracles.
- 2 Julian performed many kinds of rituals regularly in order to look into the future.
- 3 Julian personally believed in oracular (and other kinds of) revelation, and depended on it for guidance in his affairs.
- 4 Porphyry wrote c. 50–60 years before Julian, and was still considered the most famous anti-Christian writer of the period. His books were in circulation, and it would be unreasonable to think that he did not have a significant influence on Julian.³³
- 5 The discovery of the '365-year oracle' may have resulted from the acquisition of George of Alexandria's library which Julian was keenly interested in procuring as early as July 362.³⁴ The oracle was most probably in the *Philosophia ex oraculis*, and its discovery was the main stimulus for the conference with the Jews. In *Ep.* 51, written in late 362, Julian refers to his plans to rebuild the Temple *after* his Persian campaign. The discovery of the Porphyrian oracle changed his mind to start the project *before* the campaign began in March 363.
- 6 Ammianus Marcellinus (23.1.2) informs us that Julian was eager to extend the memory of his reign by great works, and he planned *at great cost* to restore the Temple in Jerusalem. He also says that he entrusted the *speedy* performance of the work to Alypius. Why speedy? What made him change his mind not only about the timing of the project, but also what made him between July 362 and the following winter (December–February 363) feel compelled to do it hurriedly? The answer could very well be that he wanted to see the fulfilment of the prophecy *in his lifetime before the 365 years were terminated*.
- 7 From an early age Julian was familiar with the scriptures, including the Olivet eschatological discourse of Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 which give Jesus' prophecy about the Temple. The Porphyrian oracle was perceived as divine

inspiration for the restoration of the Temple and retribution for Jesus' false prediction.

- 8 Julian constantly relied on Neoplatonic philosophers for prophetic wisdom, often in direct opposition to the traditional practices of his soothsayers.³⁵ Ephrem, in *Hymn against Julian* 4.22, describes Julian's attempt to rebuild the Temple as the *divination of a madman*. This may indeed imply that the Porphyrian oracle motivated him. 'Divination' was a word used in the preface of the *Philosophia ex oraculis* to explain the salvific benefits that Porphyry's readers would receive (see Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 4.6–7).
- 9 Ephrem the Syrian is one of the earliest Christian writers to refer to Julian's Temple restoration, but he never mentions the Olivet discourse passages. He uses Daniel to argue from prophecy that the Temple would not be rebuilt. Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem, also uses Daniel's prophecy, which he says was confirmed by Christ, to show that the Temple would not be rebuilt. Porphyry's interpretation of Daniel in the *Contra Christianos*, combined with the 365-year oracle, motivated Julian to begin the project when he did. Both were integral to his desire to disprove Jesus' prophecy. Ephrem calls Julian the 'king of Greece' (Alexander) who 'rejected Daniel' and provoked God to anger. We have seen that Porphyry argued that Daniel was not a true prophecy, but simply a historical book.
- 10 Socrates (*H. E.* 3.23) says that both Porphyry and Julian were scoffers at those they disliked (the Christians), referring to Porphyry as Julian's 'father'. This strongly suggests that Porphyry had a direct influence on Julian's anti-Christian polemics.
- 11 Julian admits that the manifestation of the prophetic spirit in his day was rare. Yet he sought oracles for guidance and to know the future. He kept several collections of books on the proper interpretation of prophetic revelation in a chest which he took with him even while on campaign. One book was a 'Book of Oracles'. He also consulted the Sibylline Books in Rome. We hear of books on the interpretation of lightning, Tarquitian Books 'On Signs from Heaven', and Etruscan Books 'On War' for the precise interpretation of omens before battle. If these were consulted regularly, and he had a preference for Neoplatonic oracles how much more would he confide in the collection of oracles (*Phil. or.*) compiled by a renowned anti-Christian Neoplatonist (Porphyry)?³⁶
- 12 Julian strongly believed that 'signs' in the form of concrete historical events must follow a prophecy in order to confirm its authenticity:

It is not possible to behold the truth from speech alone, but some clear sign must follow on what has been said that will guarantee the prophecy that has been made concerning the future.

(*C. Gal.* 358E)

Ammianus tells us that Julian was an expert in the discernment of such prophetic signs (21.1.6; also 22.1.2; 23.3.6–7, 23.5.8–9.), and the emperor wrote to Libanius on 10 March 363 that at the beginning of the Persian campaign Zeus showed many favourable signs from heaven (*Ep.* 58). Because he received oracles and accompanying signs, Libanius says that Julian carried out his plans

‘with the end already in full view’(Or. 13.49). A project as vast as rebuilding the Temple presupposes two known facts about Julian’s belief in prophetic revelation. First, an oracle motivated him to restore the Temple. Second, the rebuilt Temple could be a concrete sign to prove that Jesus’ prophecy about the Temple was false, and Porphyry’s oracle about Christianity’s termination 365 years after Jesus began to be worshipped was true.

The date is arguably important. Augustine, who of course believed in the deity of Christ, dates the beginning of his worship at Pentecost (*Civ. Dei* 18.54) c. 29 CE in the consulship of the two Gemini. He calculates that the 365 years ended on the Ides of May in the consulship of Honorius and Eutychianus in 398. The next year (18 March 399) officials in Carthage demolished pagan temples and images.

Augustine then gives a concrete ‘sign’ that the prophecy was false. In the 30 years since that day, he says, Christianity has increased, and then he adds: ‘Who does not see how much the worship of the name of Christ had grown during the period of nearly thirty years from then to the present, especially after many of those became Christians who had been held back from the faith by that supposedly true prophecy, which they now saw, after the completion of the specified number of years, to be foolish and ridiculous?’ (*Civ. Dei* 18.54). This demonstrates clearly that many pagans during Augustine’s day strongly believed in Porphyry’s prophecy.

In 363 Julian had about two years left for the ‘sign’ confirming Porphyry’s prophecy to occur, provided that he dated the beginning of Christianity at the birth of Christ. Porphyry’s oracle declared that Christianity would expire *immediately* 365 years from the worship of Christ. Julian knew that according to Matthew, this began in Bethlehem when the Magi brought presents to the stable. Julian’s insistence on calling Jesus the Galilean is not so much because he denied the Christians any claim to universality (Athanasiasiadi 1992: 161, n. 2) as it was to stress the mere humanity of Jesus. Yet if Julian dated the beginning of the worship of Jesus at Pentecost as Augustine did, he could still look forward to seeing the fulfilment of Porphyry’s prophecy in his lifetime because in 394 CE (Augustine’s calculations were inaccurate) he would have been 63. Even if he had not lived to see the Temple completed, he would have been given credit for it. Ammianus’ remark that Julian was compelled to move forward hurriedly with the project is best understood as a decision that was motivated by his belief in the fulfilment of the Porphyrian oracle within two years from the time he finished the *Contra Galilaeos*. We may conclude that Julian wrote the *C. Gal.* during the winter of 362–3 in his palace, mainly at night, while dealing with growing discontent in Antioch, preparing for the Persian campaign, and meeting with Jewish officials concerning the rebuilding of the Temple. He had sent two letters months before to Alexandria demanding that books from George’s library be sent to him immediately. This is one possible source of Porphyry’s works on philosophy, which may have included polemical writings. It is logical to assume that Julian consulted the *Contra Christianos* and *Phil. or.* while writing the *C. Gal.*, and he may have discovered the prophecy that predicted the termination of Christianity 365 years after its beginning while reading the *Phil. or.* This motivated the emperor to convene a speedy meeting with Jewish officials to initiate work on the Temple project.

This helps us to understand why Julian moved the date for the beginning of the construction from *after* to *before* the Persian campaign, and why he moved forward with it hurriedly.

In March 363 Julian set out for his Persian campaign against the advice of his best soothsayers who admonished him both before and during the invasion that the gods did not favour the enterprise (Libanius, *Or.* 12.76; Socrates, *H. E.* 3.19–21; Ammianus Marcellinus 23.2.7, 23.5.11). As we have noted, the emperor increasingly relied on prophetic guidance, especially oracles, provided by Neoplatonic philosophers like Maximus of Ephesus (Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.36; Ammianus Marcellinus 22.12.6–7; Ephrem, *Hymn against Julian* 2.8; Socrates, *H. E.* 3.21). Ammianus Marcellinus describes many ‘signs’ which occurred during the invasion to prove the divine disfavour expressed by the soothsayers (23.5.10, 23.3.6–7, 23.5.4–5, 23.5.12–14, 25.2.7–8). After an attempt to take Ctesiphon (May 363) failed, Julian ordered a retreat as Shapur II’s army was approaching, and on 26 June 363 he was fatally wounded at the age of 32 while leading a counter-attack against the Persians. He died later in the evening in his tent (Ammianus Marcellinus 25.3.1–23; Libanius, *Or.* 17.23; Socrates, *H. E.* 3.21; Sozomen, *H. E.* 6.1), and his body was taken to Tarsus where it was given a customary imperial burial. The Christian Jovian became the next emperor (Ammianus Marcellinus 25.5.4–9).³⁷

THEMES OF THE *CONTRA GALILAEOS*

As we have seen, during the winter of 362–3 Julian hurriedly wrote the *Contra Galilaeos* in the midst of economic problems in Antioch, planning the Persian campaign, and beginning construction of the Temple in Jerusalem (Libanius, *Or.* 18.178; Masaracchia 1986; Athanassiadi 1992: 362–3; Smith 1995: 190). The text of the *C. Gal.* is lost, though parts of Books 1 from an original three are preserved in Cyril of Alexandria’s refutation which was written in the 430s (Masaracchia 1986). Lacking in original thought and not profoundly intellectual, the *C. Gal.* is described by Libanius as a work that was produced without any attention to elegance (*Or.* 18.178). Julian often irritates his readers by jumping from one subject to another, then back again to his original theme (*C. Gal.* 213B–C; 218 A–B). He sometimes promises that he will cover a subject later in his treatise, then proceed to do it (213A). It is indeed a disappointing work, often repetitive, and, according to one scholar, it demonstrates the emperor’s inability to distinguish the fundamental from the trivial (Malley 1978). Julian possessed neither the analytical, theological, historical and linguistic expertise of Porphyry, nor the propriety and objectivity of Celsus. The whole work would have been well served by an efficient editorial revision.

Early in Book 1 Julian tells us the purpose of writing the *C. Gal.*:

... to set forth to all mankind the reasons by which I was convinced that the fabrication of the Galileans is a fiction of men composed by wickedness.

(*C. Gal.* 39A: Wright)

He says further that the Christian uses that part of the soul that loves childish

fables to induce men to believe that a 'monstruous tale' is true (39B). Christians wail over the corpse of a Jew because they have abandoned the ever-living gods of the Romans. Their religion is absurd, and their doctrines are not divine (39B; 138C; 194D; 197C; 206A; 229D). The *C. Gal.* appears to have been written in association with Julian's attempt to revive Hellenism in the Eastern urban centres of the empire, and it was written with the twofold objective of demonstrating the superiority of Greek *paideia* to Christianity, and showing that the Christians lacked the support of ancient ancestral customs. To achieve his goal, Julian develops six major themes in the *Contra Galilaeos*. We now turn to these themes.³⁸

Jesus

The purpose of Julian's criticism of Jesus is to show that he was not God, and he reinforces his argument first by proving the novelty of Christianity. The Galileans, he says, have abandoned both Hellenism and the ancestral teachings of the Jews. Just 'yesterday' Jesus' doctrine appeared, and it has done nothing to ameliorate the urban culture of the empire (*Ep.* 47; *C. Gal.* 106C; 194D; 197C; 201E; 238A). Christianity is an enormous pretension (*C. Gal.* 116A), primarily because the Christians have misinterpreted the Hebrew scriptures. Jesus was never recognized by God (in the Old Testament) as his 'Son' (159E). Of all the New Testament writers, it was only John who made up the 'evil doctrine' of the divinity of Christ (335B). Anyway, even the Jews themselves rejected Jesus, who brought an infectious disease to the world and actually opposed God's will for mankind to worship many gods (159E). The Logos Doctrine of Johannine theology, moreover, is contradictory: if Jesus is indeed God, why does John say: 'No man has ever seen God at any time' (333D)? Because the Christian teaching about Jesus is a myth, he cannot therefore in any way *save* mankind. Mankind has prospered much more from the worship of such deities as Helios (*Ep.* 47, 55; Ugenti 1992: 395–402; Smith 1995: 197–204).

Julian also criticizes the teachings and works of Jesus. For instance, to reinforce his claim that Hellenism is superior to Christianity because the latter has abandoned its ancestral customs, Julian mocks the assertion of Jesus that the Jews are God's 'Chosen people' (106B). Since Jesus neither lived a pure life, nor did he teach it to his disciples (205E), his teachings which are recorded in the evangelists would cause the disintegration of the Roman empire if everyone practised them (*C. Gal.* fr. no. 5). Hence the Galilean man-made myth is detested of the gods and will poison Hellenism, which is the true salvation of the world (*Ep.* 147; Malley 1978: 12). Jesus' works are equally condemned. To prove that Jesus was not God, Julian develops further the argument of Celsus which attributed Jesus' miraculous power to the operation of magic by maintaining that Moses, the prophets, Jesus, and his disciples surpassed all the magicians and charlatans of every place and period in history (100A). (His penchant for hyperbole is evident here.) Julian thus greatly minimizes the soteriological value of Jesus' works:

Yet Jesus, who won over the least worthy of you, . . . accomplished nothing worth hearing of, unless anyone thinks that to heal crooked and blind men and

to exorcise those who were possessed by evil demons in the villages of Bethesda and Bethany can be classed as a mighty achievement (191E).

If Jesus did not offer any lasting benefits to his own people, who in the end rejected him, why should an erudite person not accept Hellenism which has been the fount of many divine blessings since ancient times?³⁹

As we have already noted above, a classic theme in anti-Christian polemics was the rejection of the apologists' 'Proof from Prophecy' argument. Julian continued this tradition, and because of his sound knowledge of scripture, he was able to attack it from several perspectives. The major point he makes is that the Old Testament Messianic prophecies have been misconstrued by the Christians, who falsely applied them to Jesus. Nowhere in the Pentateuch, he argues, did Moses predict a Messiah who would be 'God born from God'. Moses taught the Hebrews to worship one God, not two (262B-C, E; 276E; 290C-D; 291A). Christian biblical theologians have eisegeted and now worship Jesus as a second (false) God. Besides, the Mosaic prophecies often apply to king David, and Isaiah 7.14 did not predict the virgin birth of a God (253B-E; 261E; 262B-D). Julian also asserts that the mythological tritheism expressed in the baptismal formula given by Jesus in Matt. 28.14 clearly contradicts the Mosaic monotheism of the Pentateuch (291A). Other examples of the New Testament doctrines that came about by the corruption of the original teaching of Moses and the prophets are the Incarnation; the deity, passion, and resurrection of Christ; the Pauline concept of Christ being the 'end of the Law'; the Mariological doctrine of Theotokos; and the cult of the martyrs which, to the emperor, was tantamount to witchcraft and violates Old and New Testament teaching (320; 320B-C; 327A-C; 335D; 339A-C; 262D; 276E-277A).

God

To Julian Christian teaching about God is absurd and trivial, and it lacks the superior rationalism of Greek philosophy (160E). Though some scholars have interpreted Julian's thought as based on a concept of natural theology which presupposes an innate knowledge of God, this does not, as we have already seen above, rule out any need for divine revelation (52B-C; Smith 1995: 192f.). Innate knowledge provided a general epistemology concerning the nature of the divine and helped to answer a number of teleological questions about the relationship between providence and the natural world. Revelation, whether it manifested itself by oracles, Chaldean-Neoplatonic theurgy, soothsaying, or extispicy, made the divine world and its otherwise inaccessible, mysterious, and secret knowledge relevant and accessible to the inquirer. The recipient of the revelation possessed the confidence that the personal decisions of his daily life were influenced and protected by supernatural guidance. 'Personal religion' of this kind was a symptom of the age; it affected pagans and Christians alike, permeated all classes in society, made contact with the gods possible, and it often degenerated into absurd practices. Neoplatonism supplied Julian with much of the conceptual basis for his understanding of God, and this would include the belief in the divinity of the cosmos (69C). Hence God does not increase or decrease, he is immutable, free from decay and generation. He is

pure, immortal, eternal, and transcendent (69C). As an intellectual Julian rejected the Graeco-Roman myths which depicted (e.g.) Kronos eating his children and Zeus having sex with his mother (44A-B). Even more so will he call Hebrew myths absolutely incredible (75A; Meredith 1980: 1143), and the Judaeo-Christian God of scripture gave him plenty of ammunition for the *Contra Galilaeos*. He specifically criticizes the particularity of the Hebrew God which, he argues, prevents Christianity from being a truly universal religion (100C). In contradistinction to the Platonic doctrine of divine impassibility, Julian excoriates the irrational nature of the Christian God which is inferior even to the mildness of Lycurgus, the forbearance of Solon, and the benevolence of the Romans (168C; 171D). The God of scripture possesses weaknesses of character normally condemned in humans. He constantly expresses jealousy, anger, resentment, and other features inconsistent with divinity, which prove his indisputable irrationality (106E; 152B-D; 155C-D; 160D; 161A). The Hebrew God is best understood as one of the many national gods to whom the higher power has delegated responsibilities for their particular territories. The incorporation of the Hebrew God into his philosophical system can have benefited his attempt to revive Hellenism in the urban centres of the East in at least four ways. First, he was able to defend traditional polytheism and at the same time give a coherent explanation for the diversity of religious culture. Second, he could attempt to explain the tension between monotheism and polytheism based on a theology of the cosmos which was characterized by a Neoplatonic understanding of a hierarchy of Being. Third, on a broader scale, he could see it as an impetus for the revival of Hellenism in the urban centres of the East. Finally, he could show that Christianity should be abandoned because it lacks the support of ancient ancestral customs (115D-E; 116A-B; 143B-C; 148B-C; 155E). The Christian doctrine of God is therefore pure nonsense (155E).

Creation

Julian quotes Plato's *Timaeus* 30B to prove that Platonic cosmology is superior to the biblical account of creation in Genesis 1-2 (57B-C). The cosmos exists as a living creature with a soul and intelligence (57C-D). Exegeting *Timaeus* 41A-C, Julian maintains that the visible celestial planets and stars are likenesses of the invisible gods (65B-C). The immortal part of humans was given by the Demiurge as the rational soul, and the rest of the process of becoming consisted of weaving mortality and immortality (65D). In Genesis Moses fails to inform us of the immediate creator of the universe (66A). Julian follows Plato by saying that God is not the creator of material things, but only disposes of pre-existing matter (49C-D). The transcendent God who is the principle of ultimate reality is at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of being, and from him emanates all other ontological levels of reality.

As the creator of mortal beings and material reality, the God of Genesis was perceived by pagan philosophers as a being demoted in the metaphysical realm, and because of this Julian specifically castigates the creation stories in Genesis 1-2. For instance, on the creation of Eve, he asks whether God did not know that she would be a misfortune to Adam (75B). He further asks why God denied to humans the power to distinguish between good and evil (89A). To Julian this is a ludicrous myth for four reasons. First, it depicts God as being ignorant that the woman

became a deceiver. Second, God refused something beneficial for Adam and Eve: the knowledge of good and evil. Third, God was jealous about the possibility of humans eating from the tree. Finally, God became envious when Adam and Eve knew good and evil, and expelled them from the garden (75B; 89A; 93E; 94A). Such concepts as sin, human free will, and choice were abhorrent to a Neoplatonist who believed that all levels of material reality are immutably ordered by providence for a world which is essentially eternal.

Criticism of scripture

Julian is similar to Porphyry in that both possessed a sound knowledge of scripture and used it against the Christians. To ascertain the nature of his knowledge, we may first observe that 98 scriptural passages are cited or alluded to in Julian's works, and most of these are found in the *Contra Galilaeos*. Fifty-seven are from the Old Testament and 41 from the New.⁴⁰ Forty-four of the Old Testament passages come from the Pentateuch: (16) Genesis, (11) Exodus, (9) Deuteronomy, (5) Leviticus, (3) Numbers; 13 derive from other books: (2) I Samuel, (3) I Kings, (1) 2 Kings, (5) Isaiah, (1) Psalms, (1) Hosea. Of the New Testament passages there are 28 from the evangelists: (13) Matthew, (5) Matthew or another evangelist (4) Luke (1), Mark (1), Mark or Luke (1), John (4); and 21 from the other books: (6) Acts, (7) Pauline writings (3) I Corinthians, (1) Colossians, (1) Hebrews. Of the New Testament figures named we have Jesus (24 times), John (8), Matthew (7), Mark (4), Luke (4), and Paul (13).⁴¹ The function of scripture in the polemics of Julian was probably influenced by Porphyry, and we may give four premises of his argument (Meredith 1980: 1147):

- 1 The Christians have abandoned Hebrew traditions and have misinterpreted scriptures (the Old Testament) (238B; *Ep.* 47).
- 2 Even if one trained a child in the scriptures from a young age, his character would not be any better than that of a slave (230A-235B). Scripture does not make one wiser, braver, or better than one was before he read it (230A). It is not therefore for the intelligent, nor for those seeking wisdom (229D).
- 3 Greek writings, which Christians often ascribe to the Devil, enable people to acquire courage, wisdom and justice. They actually produce virtue in those not endowed with the natural ability to apprehend them. To the person so endowed, he becomes a gift of the gods to civilization (229D; 230A-B).
- 4 Christians use Greek learning in their theology. If their scripture is sufficient, why do they nibble at Greek literature (229C)?

The church: doctrines and practices

The apostate emperor believed that the church is under a double curse because it has abandoned both the polytheism of the Greeks and the traditions of its Hebrew fathers (238A-B). Although Julian admits that he is not a Jew, he expresses respect for the God of Abraham and Isaac, and argues that the Christians rebelled against the Mosaic Law. For example, they do not keep the Passover, practise circumcision,

sacrifice animals, or honour the food laws of the covenant (314C; 343C; 351A; 354A-B). Furthermore, the Galileans have not accepted a single admirable teaching from the Greeks or the Hebrews (43A), and the only thing that the latter have in common with the Christians is the rejection of polytheism (238C-D). This is very unfortunate, he claims, because the gods have sent many lawgivers to the Greeks who were superior to Moses (141D). At least the Christians would be following some sort of law if they had not abandoned Hebrew customs, although it is harsh and inferior to the humane laws of the Romans (202A), and in reality they have transgressed all the commandments that God gave to Moses (351B; also 42E-43A; 99E; 141C-D; 218B; 253A-B; 254B; *Epp.* 20).

In conjunction with this theme of the Christian abandonment of the truth Julian develops a protean attack upon the past and contemporary followers of Jesus. He says, probably following Celsus, that only the very base people of society like shopkeepers, slaves, maidservants and dancers become Christians (206A; 238D-E; 245A-C; 191D-E; *Ep.* 55). Christians are misguided and foolish, wicked and arrogant (194C; 229C; 230A; 238B). Julian focuses on the early leaders of the Apostolic Age, such as Peter (314D-E) and Paul (106B). For example, he maintains that Paul's teaching is full of contradictions, and his concept of Christian universalism is ridiculous. After quoting Rom. 3:29 and Gal. 3:28, he asks why did God neglect most of humanity for thousands of years, who in ignorance served idols, but only recently came to a small tribe in an isolated part of Palestine. If he is indeed the God of all alike, as Paul teaches, why did he neglect the Greeks (106D)?

Julian's criticism of Christianity often includes contemporary practices in the church. Calling Christians the most depraved of all people, for instance, he mocks those believers who make the sign of the cross and 'hiss at demons' (*Ep.* 19; Bolton 1968). Why should they adore the wood of the cross, he asks, but refuse to revere the shield that providentially fell from the sky during Numa's reign (194C)? The cult of the martyrs is based on witchcraft, it has caused the worship of many corpses, and it disobeys Jesus' teaching recorded in Matt. 23:27 (*Ep.* 41; *C. Gal.* 201E; 202A; 224E; 327B; 335B-C; 340A). Christian worship is maligned as impure, unholy, full of superstitions, an infectious disease, and basically atheistic (*Ep.* 20 and 47; *C. Gal.* 43B; 202A). He uses Nicene Logos theology against the Semi-Arians to prove that because of their disagreement over doctrines Christians certainly cannot possess the truth (206A). The rite of baptism is supposed to 'wash' sin away according to *I Cor.* 6:9-11, but in fact Julian says it is not conducive to the reformation of character (245D). *New Revelation* from God claimed by the Galileans is rejected because Moses made it clear that the Old Testament Law is for all time (319D-E; *Ep.* 47; *C. Gal.* fr. 1). Indeed, Christians have not even remained faithful to Apostolic doctrines, and evidence of this is the Johannine notion that Jesus is God (327A).

The superiority of Greek *paideia*

Julian's programme to revive Hellenism in the Eastern urban centres of the Roman empire⁴² was predominantly motivated by the unswerving personal conviction that Greek *paideia* was a gift of the gods which had preserved civilization, caused the development of high culture, and blessed humanity with true salvation (Criscuolo

1986; Alan Cameron 1993: 25–9). This latter point – the soteriological implications of Julian’s policy – has not been given the attention it deserves. For example, Julian was aware that some of the success of Christianity during its 300 years was attributable at least partly to the church’s claim to a unique revelation from God (Ugenti 1992: 393), the application of the Hebrew concept of the ‘Chosen People’ to itself, and the belief that its religion was the only truly universal religion (Couloubaritsis 1995). To confront these notions, Julian stresses the sacred origin of Rome beginning with the Regal Period (753–510 BCE). Zeus brought about the birth of Rome and her great empire by setting over her Numa, the great philosopher-king who communed with the gods in pure thought and was inspired by divine oracles given by the Sibyl (194B-C; see Fouquet 1981: 196; Scott 1987: 345; Wallace-Hadrill 1981).

Julian builds on this conceptual foundation in a number of ways. We may first mention his conviction that Greek literature is far superior to Christian scripture, and educated Christian writers have borrowed much from it (171D; 229C). Julian also contrasts the Greek gods with the Hebrew God. Relying on Platonic soteriology, he says that men should not imitate the God of scripture, if indeed salvation is based on imitating God, the contemplation of the intelligibles, and freedom from passion, because this God often expresses anger, jealousy, wrath, resentment and grief (171E). Jews and gentiles are in agreement on many doctrines except monotheism, and actually Solomon, who was the wisest of the Hebrews, practised polytheism (141C-D; 171E; 176A-B; 224E; 306A-B). It must be emphasized here that for Julian, ‘gods’ does not refer to the deities of the Greek myths, but rather to Helios, Asclepius, and others which have been given a philosophical reinterpretation. Because they have a superior aptitude for the mysteries and theology, the wise men of the Greeks have given civilization a more noble concept of deity than that espoused by the Hebrews. Plato was more worthy than Moses of communion with God, the Greeks had an aptitude for theology, and therefore the Hebrews – and even much more the Christians – do not have a legitimate claim to a ‘unique revelation’ or to the status of the ‘Chosen People of God’ (49A-B; 171D; 176A-B; *Ep.* 3 and 36). The most profitable goal for all humanity is to pursue Greek philosophy (*Ep.* 3).

His concept of Greek *paideia* is not, however, restricted to religion, but rather encompasses every facet of Graeco-Roman civilization. In every area of the arts and sciences Greek learning greatly surpasses that of the Hebrews, and he gives examples of law, government, military science, medicine, philosophy, cosmology, astronomy, mathematics, music and, of course, theology (178A-B; 190C; 222A; 224C-D; 235C). Finally, Julian strikes at the central message of Christianity, the doctrine of Christ the saviour of the world, by referring to the ‘greatest gift of the gods’, the saving-deity Asclepius. Salvific theophanies of this god have been numerous in history. He has descended to earth as a man and visited Epidaurus, Pergamum, Rome, and many other cities. His salvation is even now universally available to all throughout the empire, and the benefits he gives to his worshippers far exceed the paltry number of miracles performed by the Galilean years ago in a dark corner of Palestine. Asclepius has healed many sick bodies, trained and educated many souls, and his oracles have been found everywhere on earth. Julian himself testifies that the

god healed him of illnesses by prescribing remedies, and he will grant eternal salvation in the next life. He concludes that as a saving and healing deity, Asclepius is far superior to Jesus (200A-B; 235B-D).

NOTES

- 1 See Libanius, *Oration* 18.8 (Julian's funeral oration). The many writers who have covered the biography of Julian include Browning (1976), Bowersock (1978), Athanassiadi (1992) and Smith (1995). Vidal (1964) is an impressive novelistic account.
- 2 Libanius, *Oration* 13.8; 18.10–11; Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.1. Cf. Bowersock (1978: 23f.) and Smith (1995: 2, 23–48).
- 3 Libanius, *Orations* 12.3, 80; 13.13 (very religious); 12.94; 18.30 (studious); 12.95 (ascetic); Julian, *Epistle* 60, to Himerius (sensitive to human pain); *Ep.* 23, to Ecdicius (personal library); Ammianus Marcellinus 25.4.1–3 (sexually pure after his wife's death); 25.4.5–6 (moderation in eating and drinking); 25.4.7 (his wisdom); 25.4.8–14 (political and military skills); 25.4.16 (inconsistent); 25.4.17 (very talkative and superstitious); Socrates, *H. E.* 3.1 (self-controlled). Ammianus Marcellinus (24.4.27) says that after a Roman victory during the Persian campaign, Julian would not so much as look at the young virgins taken captive, even though Persian girls were known for their beauty. See also, in general, Browning (1976: 42), Bowersock (1978: 12–20), Smith (1995: 7). Bouffartigue (1989) tries – unconvincingly – to give a psychological sketch of Julian, especially concerning his 'paranoia'. On his love of applause, see Ammianus Marcellinus 25.4.18.
- 4 See Festugière (1957) and Smith (1995: 2). For this formative period, see Browning (1976: 40–41); Athanassiadi (1977); Bowersock (1978: 25); Paschoud (1980); Demarolle (1986); Klein (1986); Gauthier (1987); Buck (1990) and Bouffartigue (1992: 13–49).
- 5 Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 473. Sozomen says that Julian was brought up in the knowledge of the scriptures (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.2).
- 6 On being a reader see Socrates, *H. E.* 3.1; Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.1. I find no reason to doubt that Julian was a sincere Christian early in his life, on which see Ammianus Marcellinus 21.2.3–4; Ephrem, *Hymn against Julian* 1.14; Libanius, *Or.* 13.12; Socrates, *H. E.* 3.1; Sozomen, *H. E.* 5.1; Theodoret, *H. E.* 3.1; Vogt (1963); Masaracchia (1990: 9) and Smith (1995: 182–89).
- 7 E. g., Ephrem, *Hymn against Julian* 1.1. For Ephrem, see Lieu (1986). Drinkwater (1983: 355) believes Julian was a Christian in outward appearance (see the preceding note). For Macellum, see (e. g.) Sozomen, *H. E.* 5.2; Browning (1976: 40); Smith (1995: 2). Bidez (1930) remains a good source.
- 8 Cf. Sozomen, *H. E.* 5.2. For Julian's Latin education see Lacombrade (1960).
- 9 *Ep.* 2, to Priscus. Ephrem, *Hymn against Julian* 1.16 calls Julian a 'Chaldaean'. For the influence of Iamblichus, see Alonso-Nunez (1973); Balty (1974: 267–69); Browning (1976: 51–62); Lewy (1978: 151 [n. 312] and 270); Saffrey (1981); Sheppard (1982); Penati (1982 and 1983); Marcone (1984); Shaw (1985); Dillon (1987), who gives a good survey of Iamblichean Neoplatonism, and Finamore (1988), Scott (1987) Athanassiadi (1992: 136) and Ugenti (1992).
- 10 Cf. Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 473 (Maximus was Julian's teacher); 475 (he used theurgy to make Hecate's statue smile); Socrates, *H. E.* 3.1 (Maximus influenced Julian philosophically); Sozomen, *H. E.* 5.1, says Julian renounced Christianity and purged

himself of baptism by pagan sacrifices); Libanius, *Or.* 18.18 (Julian's conversion to Neoplatonism); Sozomen, *H. E.* 5.2 and Theodoret, *H. E.* 3.1 (Julian's initiation). On Julian's initiation/apostasy see Athanassiadi (1977), Lewy (1978: 248), Fouquet (1981: 191–202), Gauthier (1987: 233) and Klein (1986: 278). Drinkwater (1983: 359) argues that from 351 CE Julian was not the centre of a pagan resistance movement, and Maximus 'stage-managed' Julian's formal apostasy, views with which I disagree on evidence given earlier in this essay. (cf. Averil Cameron 1993: 89; Smith 1995: 138). Athanassiadi (1977) argues for a conversion to Mithraism evidenced in Julian's *Hymn to King Helios*; for an opposite view, see Smith (1995: 139–62). On Mithraism, see Gordon (1972) and Ulansey (1989).

- 11 Cf. Libanius, *Or.* 18.24–7, 29; Socrates *H. E.* 2.34; Sozomen, *H. E.* 3.1, 5.2; Smith (1995: 3); Browning (1976: 64–6).
- 12 Cf. Julian, *Ep.* 26, early 362 from Constantinople for Julian's affection for St Basil.
- 13 Libanius, *Or.* 13.24–32; Eunapius, *Philos.* 476; Sozomen, *H. E.* 5.1–2; Socrates, *H. E.* 3.1; Browning (1976: 79–104), Bowersock (1978: 33–45).
- 14 Libanius, *Or.* 12.44–6, 13.24–32 for the Strasbourg and Gaul campaign in general; also 18.55, 18.75–91; Smith (1995: 3).
- 15 Libanius, *Or.* 12.65, 13.36; Ammianus Marcellinus 21.7–16.6, 20.10–11; Sozomen, *H. E.* 5.1; Socrates *H. E.* 3.1; Theodoret, *H. E.* 3.1. Browning (1976: 120) and Smith (1995: 3).
- 16 Ammianus Marcellinus 22.5.1–5; Libanius, *Or.* 18.126; Sozomen, *H. E.* 5.3, on restoring priests' tax exemptions; Theodoret, *H. E.* 3.3; Socrates, *H. E.* 3.1, 3.11; Eunapius, *Philos.* 478; Libanius, *Or.* 12.69, 17.9 and 17.18. Cf. Ephrem, *Hymn against Julian* 1.4, 2.1, 2.3, 2.27; Julian, *Ep.* 41, to the Citizens of Bostra 1 August 362, and *Ep.* 47, to the Alexandrians November or December 362. Also cf. Downey (1955, 1957), Arce (1975), Browning (1976: 178), Chuvin (1990: 43), Athanassiadi (1992: 181–89), Averil Cameron (1993: 93–4), Bradbury (1995).
- 17 *Oration* 4.64. Cf. Bidez (1930: 310), Downey (1957: 98), Hardy (1968) and Malley (1978: 205).
- 18 Socrates, *H. E.* 3.12; Libanius, *Or.* 18.122–4; Julian, *Ep.* 41, to the citizens of Bostra 1 August 362, from Antioch; also see Hardy (1968: 136), Chuvin (1990: 43) and Woods (1997).
- 19 Socrates, *H. E.* 3.1; Sozomen, *H. E.* 5.5; Theodoret, *H. E.* 3.2; Ammianus Marcellinus 22.5.2.
- 20 Libanius, *Or.* 18.126; Ammianus Marcellinus 22.4.3; Socrates, *H. E.* 3.1; Sozomen, *H. E.* 5.2, 5; Theodoret, 3.2; Lieu (1986: 45).
- 21 Socrates, *H. E.* 3.12: Julian told Maris, bishop of Chalcedon, who was suffering from cataracts, that he was a blind old fool, and the Galilean god would never heal him.
- 22 For instance, note his special hatred for bishops like Athanasius: Theodoret, *H. E.* 3.5 (exile ordered); Socrates, *H. E.* 3.14 (his flight); Julian, *Ep.* 24, An Edict to the Alexandrians (exile ordered); *Ep.* 46, to Ecdicius Prefect of Egypt, calling Athanasius 'the enemy of the gods' and ordering him to leave Egypt. For Julian's treatment of bishops see Fowden (1978).
- 23 Theodoret, *H. E.* 3.3, reporting that the bones belonged to John the Baptist. Cf. Sozomen, *H. E.* 5.10.
- 24 Cf. Athanassiadi (1992: 122) Graeco-Roman culture is a product of divine revelation. This is evidence that Julian was interested in prophecy.
- 25 See Julian, *Ep.* 20, to Theodorus the High Priest, spring 362, who is told to avoid innovations in religion and observe the customs inherited from their forefathers because the gods gave them to humanity.
- 26 See Julian, *Ep.* 22. Julian caused a number of Christians to apostasize (Theodoret, *H. E.*

- 3.8). Another reform was forbidding the religious curse: priests should be men of prayer and blessing (see Julian, *Ep.* 18). On his religious reforms see Alonso-Nunez (1973: 185) and the standard reference texts previously mentioned.
- 27 See Jones (1963: 30). I disagree with Hardy (1968: 138), who interprets the edicts as ancillary to Julian's political reforms and not as persecuting policy. Browning (1976: 174), Bowersock (1978: 83–4), Malley (1978: 27) and Meredith (1980: 1138) see it as at least partly anti-Christian. See also Klein (1986: 47); Masaracchia (1990: 11) and Smith (1995: 199).
- 28 Cf. Bidez (1930: 266–8): Julian desired to set up a pagan church centrally organized like that of the Christian which practised theurgy and Neoplatonism. For discussion see Browning (1976: 134–43), Bowersock (1978) who sensibly argues that Julian was decidedly anti-Christian from the start, Athanassiadi (1992: 181), Bradbury (1995) and Smith (1995).
- 29 Ammianus Marcellinus 22.12.7 and 22.13; Socrates *H. E.* 3.18; Theodoret *H. E.* 3.6f.; Julian, *Ep.* 29; Libanius, *Or.* 17.30. Also see Gregory (1983) and standard references.
- 30 Ammianus Marcellinus 22.13.1 says the fire was caused by a pagan philosopher who left burning candles by the cultic statue.
- 31 Cf. *C. Gal.* 198B–C; Eunapius, *Philos.* 475–6, says Julian prophesied the demise of Greek religion, including the oracles in his lifetime.
- 32 In *C. Gal.* 235C he refers to the oracles of Asclepius found everywhere in the world, an exaggeration no doubt, but it contained some truth none the less.
- 33 For various views on the extent to which Porphyry influenced Julian, see Demarolle (1986: 40–6), Masaracchia (1990: 15), Smith (1995: 40), Potter (1994: 104–5) and Chadwick (1985). A forthcoming article by me will analyse all textual and other technical data pertinent to this interpretation.
- 34 Julian, *Ep.* 23, *Ep.* 38 and *Ep.* 51. For George of Alexandria, see Sozomen, *H. E.* 3.2–3, 5.7. He was bishop of Alexandria and was murdered by a mob in 361 CE.
- 35 Ammianus Marcellinus 23.5.10–11 relates that Etruscan soothsayers repeatedly told Julian not to invade Persia, but he preferred the authority of his Platonic advisers. Cf. Smith (1995: 8).
- 36 Ammianus Marcellinus 22.12.6–7: Julian consulted many oracles; on the rarity of the prophetic spirit see Julian, *C. Gal.* 198B–C; on the 'Book of Oracles' (including the *Phil. or.*?) see Libanius, *Or.* 18.118; on the Sibylline books see Ammianus Marcellinus 23.1.7; the 'Books on Lightning', Ammianus Marcellinus 23.5.12–4; the 'Tarquitian Books', Ammianus Marcellinus 25.2.7–8; the 'Books on War', Ammianus Marcellinus 23.5.10.
- 37 For Julian's campaign and death see Browning (1976: 187–218), Bowersock (1978: 106–19), Lieu (1986: 92), Griffith (1987: 244–7) on Eastern Christians' interpretation of his death as God's ultimate triumph.
- 38 For some of the secondary literature on the *C. Gal.*, see Courcelle (1948: 64–5), Bartelink (1957: 37–48), Bolton (1968: 496–7), Malley (1978): *passim*; Meredith (1980: 1138–40), Demarolle (1986: 41–2), Gauthier (1987: 233) (the text); Masaracchia (1990: 20–1), Athanassiadi (1992: 161–9), Smith (1995: 190–207).
- 39 Cf. 213B; fr. no. 2: Moses fasted 40 days and received the Law; Elijah fasted 40 days and saw God; what did Jesus receive after his 40-day fast? Fr. no. 3: ridiculing Jesus' temptation; fr. no. 4: Why did Jesus need help from an angel if he was God?
- 40 On the whole, all figures come from Bouffartigue (1992: 156–70). For Julian's scripture references see his Appendix II: 683f.
- 41 See Bouffartigue (1992: 114–17). Demarolle (1986: 44) gives 180 references to scripture in the *C. Gal.*; cf. Meredith (1980: 1147), Klein (1986: 286) and Smith (1995: 205).
- 42 For the literature on this topic see the standard works cited above and Dostalova (1982).

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INDEX OF BIBLICAL REFERENCES



OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis

1-2 1262
1-3 1206
1-4 920
1:14-15 58
1:26 917, 920, 1223
1:27 1155
2 855
2:7 920
2:21-22 846
3:21 340
4:4 339
6:4 920
8:4 339
9:1-7 161 n. 13
9:27 90
17:23 233
21:33 93
25:23 796
26:15-33 676
27:36-40 18
32:33 340
49:10 667
49:10f 668

Exodus

12 670
12:1-35:3 88
15 88
15:3 92
16:9-10 711
17 663
20:2-17 389
20:4-5 95, 747

35:1 711

Leviticus

17-18 139, 141
17:8-9 389
17:10-16 389
19:18 144
20:2-5 389
25:8-17 129

Numbers

20 663
24:17 152, 667

Deuteronomy

5:22 711
21:23 534
23:1-3 711
23:8 711
27:26 534
30:4 (LXX) 81
31:30 711

1 Samuel

6:7 796

2 Samuel

6:5 341
6:14-16 341

1 Kings

8:14 711
8:22 711
8:55 711
8:65 711
12:20–21 711
12:21 711

2 Kings

24:1 1170

2 Chronicles

24:19–22 795

Ezra

4:7 89

Nehemiah

5:1–13 122
8:2 711
8:14 711

1 Maccabees

4:59 711
5:16 711
14:12 122
14:19 711
14:28 711

2 Maccabees

1:27–29 99
5:21–28 817
7:23–29 816
7:29 970

4 Maccabees

18:11–18 817

Psalms

1:1 964
2 920
8 920

32.6 (LXX) 593
33 787
44 988
45 920
51 493
62:1 (LXX) 785
63 493
99 (LXX) 788
113–118 781
105 493
110 988
110–147 494
122 455
132 (LXX) 788
140 (LXX) 785
140:5 965
141 493
141:2 484
148–150 493
150 778
150:4–5 778

Proverbs

3:19 920
8:22 1110
8:22ff. 920
8:22–31 988
22:20f. 1157

The Song of Songs

4:12 964
6:8 964
7:2 964

Wisdom

7:25f. 920
13–15 93

Ecclesiasticus (Siracides)

1:30 711
15:5 711
36:1–17 99

Isaiah

5:12 775
6 491
6:3 572
7:14 1261
8:23 126

54:1 512
58:6 129
60:17 (LXX) 508
61:1–6 129
63:9 (LXX) 939
64:3 663
66:3 965
66:7 796

Jeremiah

25:12 1169
29:10ff. 1169

Ezekiel

27:12–25 125
47:15–17 127
47:13–48:39 129

Daniel

2:35 969
2:45 1167

Joel

2:28–29 941, 1056, 1057, 1061, 1062

Amos

5:23 779

Micah

5:1 214

Nahum

2:12 670

Zechariah

1:12ff. 1169

Malachi

1:11 483
4 764

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew

1–2 487
1:16 57
1:18–24 57
1:20 213
1:22 145
1:23 145, 667
2:1 213
2:1–2 145
2:1–12 57
2:2 213
2:6 213, 214
2:10 213
2:11 213
2:12 213
2:13 213
2:15 145, 667
2:18 667
2:19 213
2:23 157, 163 n. 47, 667
3:4 155

3:12 966
3:13–17 475
4:4 338
4:14–16 667
4:18–22 120
4:23 711
5:1 214
5–7 389
5:17 162 n. 25
5:17–20 145
5:25–26 120
5:31–32 411
5:43–48 549
6:5 513
6:9–13 99
6:16 513
7:15 941
8:11–12 145
8:17 145
9:13 512
9:18–25 447
9:35 711

10:5-6 145
 10:17 711
 10:23 1040
 10:25 154
 10:33 1032
 10:35-37 411
 10:40 221
 11:19 121
 12:1-14 162 n. 26
 12:9 711
 12:17 145
 12:46-49 411
 12:46-50 435
 13:1-8 1123
 13:24-30 966
 13:35 145
 13:36-43 966
 13:38 966
 13:47-50 966
 13:54 711
 13:55 144, 213
 13:57 211
 15:1-20 162 n. 26
 15:8 211
 15:21-28 424
 15:22-28 447
 15:24 220
 18:15-20 711
 19:3-9 162 n. 26
 19:10-12 411
 19:16-30 411
 19:27 1155
 19:28 129
 20:25 846
 21:4 145
 21:31 121
 21:31-32 424, 447
 22:30 411
 23 145
 23:15 795
 23:23 162 n. 25
 23:27 1264
 23:34 711
 23:35 795
 24 1257
 24:2 1256
 24:15-16 972
 25:1-13 485
 25:32-46 966
 26-27 494
 26:7-13 447
 26:26-29 480
 26:30 781
 26:52-4 846
 26:56 425

26:71 163 n. 47
 27:25 145
 27:55 425
 28:7-16 161 n. 8
 28:14 1261
 28:19 645
 28:19-20 145, 477, 478
 28:20 145

Mark

1 487
 1:5 206, 208
 1:9-11 475
 1:10-11 58, 209
 1:14 207
 1:16 208
 1:16-20 122
 1:19-20 208
 1:20 205
 1:22 204
 1:23 206
 1:24 209
 1:28 206
 1:30 208
 1:32-34 206
 1:39 206
 1:40 206
 1:41 209
 1:44 205
 1:45 206-7
 2:3 206
 2:4 208
 2:6 204
 2:13 208
 2:13-14 209
 2:13-17 205
 2:14 205
 2:15 205
 2:16 121, 204-5
 2:17 205, 512
 2:18 205
 2:23-3:6 162 n. 26
 2:24 205, 209
 2:25-26 209
 2:26 204
 3:1 206
 3:1-6 204, 209
 3:6 117, 205, 207
 3:7-10 206
 3:9 208
 3:13-19 129
 3:20 208
 3:22 118, 204
 3:22-27 209

— *Index of Biblical References* —

- 3:27 204, 207
 3:31–35 411, 435
 3:32 208
 4:1 208
 4:25 204, 206
 4:26 208
 4:3 208
 4:35–42 209
 4:36 208
 4:5 208
 5:1 114
 5:2 206
 5:3 207
 5:14 206
 5:21 208
 5:21–43 204, 447
 5:22 204
 5:23 204
 5:24 208
 5:24–28 209
 5:25 206
 5:26 205
 5:27 208
 5:30 208
 5:31 208
 5:35 205
 5:40 204
 5:41 209
 6:3 208, 213
 6:9 206
 6:13 206
 6:14 204, 208
 6:14–31 117
 6:16–28 207
 6:17 204, 205, 208
 6:21 117, 120, 205
 6:22 204
 6:27 205
 6:31–34 206
 6:34 208
 6:36 125
 6:37–44 209
 6:39 208
 6:54–56 206
 6:55 206
 6:56 125
 7:1 118, 204–5
 7:1–23 162 n. 26, 205
 7:3 205
 7:5 204–5
 7:6 209
 7:9–13 205
 7:14 208
 7:17 208
 7:18–23 205
 7:21 389
 7:24 114, 447
 7:24–30 209
 7:25 206
 7:26 125, 206, 424
 7:31 114, 209
 7:32 206
 7:33 208
 7:36–37 208
 8:1–10 208–9
 8:2 208
 8:6 208
 8:11 205
 8:15 204–5
 8:22 206
 8:23 209
 8:27 114
 8:30 641
 8:31 204
 8:34 208
 9:2–8 209
 9:11 204
 9:14 204, 206, 208
 9:15 208
 9:17 208
 9:25 208
 9:35 205
 9:37 220
 9:38 206
 9:42 208
 10:1 208
 10:2 205
 10:2–3 162 n. 26
 10:5 209
 10:10–12 411
 10:13 208
 10:17–31 411
 10:18 528
 10:22 204
 10:33 204
 10:33–34 207
 10:42 204
 10:43 205
 10:44 205, 846
 10:46 206, 208
 11:5 208
 11:15 205, 206, 208
 11:15–16 209
 11:17 209
 11:18 204, 206
 11:27 204
 11:32 206
 12:1 204, 208
 12:1–8 207
 12:1–12 119

12:2 205
12:4 205
12:6 204
12:12 206
12:13 117, 205
12:13-17 204
12:14 204
12:17 204
12:18 204
12:18-27 204
12:20 204
12:25 411
12:28 204
12:29 528
12:33 209
12:34 204
12:35 204
12:37 206
12:38 204
12:38-40 204
12:40 207
12:41 204, 206
12:41-44 201
12:42 206
13 1257
13:2 1256
13:9 120, 204, 207
13:9-13 207
13:34 204-5
14:1 204, 207
14:1-9 447
14:2 206
14:3 206
14:10 204
14:11 205
14:13 206
14:14 204
14:22-25 480
14:26 781
14:32-37 485
14:43 204-6
14:43-48 207
14:47 204-5
14:53 204
14:54 204
14:55 204
14:60 204
14:61 204
14:63 204
14:66 204-5
15:1 204
15:2 204
15:3 204
15:7 207
15:8 204, 206

15:10 204
15:11 204, 206
15:15 204, 206
15:15-20 207
15:16 204-5
15:21 208
15:31 204
15:37-38 58
15:39 205
15:40 208
15:41 425
15:43 204
16:1-8 1278
16:7 161 n. 8

Luke

1:1-4 215, 236
1:30, 35 57
2:1-3 33
2:1-7 55
2:7 795
2:25-35 216
2:36-38 448
2:38 216
2:41-51 797
2:47 216
2:52 216
3:14 121
3:16 216
3:21-22 475
3:22 216, 475
4:1-3 194, 475
4:14-15 216
4:16-22 225
4:18 220
4:22 216
4:31-37 218
4:32 216
4:36 216
4:37 216
4:43 220
5:1-11 122
5:15 216
5:26 216
5:32 512
7:1-10 21, 120
7:3 216
7:5 21
7:16 216
7:17 216
7:18 216
7:22 216

7:34 121
 7:36-48 447
 7:47 424
 7:49 217
 8:1-4 425, 426, 447
 8:19-21 411, 435
 8:25 217
 8:37 217
 8:40-56 447
 8:56 217
 9:9 217
 9:11 217
 9:35 217
 9:43 217
 9:48 220
 10:16 220
 10:17 217
 10:30 462
 10:38-42 447
 11:1 99
 11:2-4 99
 11:14 217
 11:15 217
 11:27 217
 11:27-28 411
 11:51 795
 12:1 217
 12:35-48 485
 12:58-59 120
 13:17 217
 13:31 117
 14:8 211
 14:26-27 411
 15:1 121
 16:9-21 238
 16:18 411
 18:1-8 120
 18:13 121
 18:18-30 411
 18:37 163 n. 47
 18:43 217
 19:7 121
 19:40 217
 19:48 217
 20:26 217
 20:34-36 411, 415
 21 1256
 21:6 1255
 21:38 217
 22:14-20 480
 22:17-18 522
 22:25 846
 22:37 852
 23:6-12 117
 23:47 60

24 665
 24:45-47 665

John

1.1 561
 1.14 22
 1:31-34 475
 1:46 220
 1:47 220
 1:49 220
 3 479
 3:5ff. 475, 496
 4 219, 1237
 4:1-3 113
 4:1-30 447
 4:1-42 424
 4:39 424
 4:43 113
 4:44 211
 4:46-53 120
 5 797
 5:2-18 221
 5:4 964
 5:37-38 222
 5:41 211
 7 220
 7:15 222
 7:16 222
 7:28 221
 7:33 222
 7:52 220
 8:44 220
 8:48 220
 8:54 211
 9:22 152
 10:30 570, 989
 11 807
 11:1-44 447
 12:42 152
 13:1 222
 13:8 852
 13:36-37 806
 14-16 1029
 14:12 222
 14:12-13 1042
 14:28 222, 988, 996
 15:1 764
 15:18-19 219
 15:26 591
 16:2 152
 16:5 222
 16:10 222
 16:12 1041

16:17 222
 16:33 219
 17:3 995
 17:14 219
 17:16 219
 17:20–21 223
 17:21–23 223
 17:23 222
 18–19 494
 18:5 163 n. 47
 18:7 163 n. 47
 19:19 163 n. 47
 19:25–27 1238

Acts of the Apostles

2 1280
 2–5 702, 740
 2:5–9 81
 2:9 332
 2:17–18 1056, 1057, 1061, 1062
 2:18 1057
 2:22 163 n. 47
 2:36 641, 989
 2:38 496, 513
 2:38–42 477
 2:42 480, 496
 2:42–3:1 138
 2:46 480, 707
 3:1 136, 155
 3:6 163 n. 47, 477
 4 1280
 4:10 163 n. 47
 5:42 707
 6:1 139, 173, 174
 6:1–6 138
 6:1–7 172
 6:1–8:4 172
 6:2–6 175, 178
 6:5 139
 6:8–7:2a 172
 6:8–8:3 178
 6:11–14 175
 6:13 175
 6:14 163 n. 47
 7:2b–53 172
 7:44–50 176
 7:54–8:1 820
 7:54–8:3 177
 7:54–8:4 172
 7:58–8:1 178
 8 477
 8:1 156
 8:9–24 907

8:16 513
 8:36–38 645
 9 1280
 9:1 156
 9:1–2 179, 182
 9:1–19a 182
 9:8–22 179
 9:9 183
 9:11 183, 471
 9:12 183
 9:17–19 183
 9:19 183
 9:21 179
 10:1–11:18 176–7
 10:1–2 93
 10:9–10 194
 10:9–11:18 162 n. 18
 11:1–18 173
 11:17 641
 11:19–20 176
 11:19–21 176
 11:19–26 176
 11:20 138
 11:20–22 178
 11:26 137, 176–7, 194, 331
 12:1–5 820
 12:12 427
 13:2–3 194
 13:5 182
 13:7 740
 13:14 182, 381
 13:14–48 189
 13:15 82
 13:16 93
 13:26 93
 13:43 93
 13:50 93
 14:1 182, 381
 14:23 317
 15 136, 569, 820, 1281
 15:1 139, 141
 15:1–29 139
 15:1–35 173
 15:2 871, 1280
 15:19–21 389
 15:14 665
 15:20 139, 871
 15:23 317
 15:29 139, 871
 16:13–15 189, 426
 16:15 707
 16:19–21 872, 874
 16:21 874
 16:34 707
 16:40 427

17:1 381
17:1-3 182
17:4 426
17:6 820
17:10 182, 189, 381
17:12 189, 426
17:17 182, 381
17:23 93
17:28 548
18:1-3 447
18:1-11 182
18:3 708
18:4 381, 426
18:7 708
18:8 707
18:12-15 169
18:13 176, 215
18:18-26 447
18:19 381
18:26 427, 477, 514
19:1-7 964
19:5-7 646
19:9 710
19:17ff. 317
19:23f. 820
19:23-41 872
20:7 707
20:7-12 806
21 480
21:9 448, 514
21:17-26 175
21:18 317
21:18-22 144
21:21 189
21:25 139, 871
21:27-28 176
21:40 194
22:2 194
22:8 163 n. 47
23:12 184
23:14 184
23:21 184
23:26 216
24:2 216
24:5 157, 163 n. 46, 164 n. 48
24:17 453
24:24 216
25:8 176
25:19 169
26:9 163 n. 47
26:11 163 n. 35
26:14 194
26:28 137, 194
27 467
27:9 469

27:37 468
28:10 211
28:22 820

Romans

1:3ff. 641
1:4 641
1:7 641
1:16 171
1:19-20 1222
1:19-23 1209
1:26-27 413
2:7 211
2:10 211
2:28-29 189
3:8 144
3:20 144
3:27-4:22 144
3:29 1265
4:1ff. 149
4:11 964
4:24 641
5:12 1210
5:20 538
6:1ff. 144, 488
6:3-11 477, 496
6:14-15 144
7:15 1209
7:19-20 382
7:25 641
8:3 220
8:11 641
8:14 68
8:23 68
8:34 641
9:21 211
10:9 641
11:13-14 182
12:10 211
13 821
13:13-14 621
13:13 1208
15:19 240
15:23 240
15:23-24 463
15:24-29 453
15:25-27 187, 453
15:29 163 n. 39
15:30-32 179, 1280
16:1 317, 427, 428
16:1-16 188
16:2 709

16:3 447, 709
16:5 708
16:5-16 709
16:6 422, 427
16:6-7 709
16:7 427, 514
16:10-12 464
16:12 422, 427
16:16 886
16:23 464, 709

I Corinthians

1-2 1032
1:11 708, 709
1:16 708, 709
1:26-30 377
1:31 969
2:1-5 187
2:4 941
2:9 663
4:7 969
4:10 211
4:17 470
5:1-13 187
5:4 711
5:6-8 186
5:13 186
6:9-10 389
6:9-11 871, 1265
6:11 496
6:12-20 187
7 411-12, 415, 808, 811
7:1 187
7:1-9 191
7:1-40 187-8
7:7 187-8
7:8-9 411
7:10 512
7:10-16 187
7:10-40 412
7:13-16 435
7:16 188
7:25 187
7:25-26 188
7:29-31 189
7:32-40 188
8 1282
8:1 187
8:1-11:1 161 n. 14, 871
8:6 641
9:1 317
9:19-23 189
9:14 512

9:20 144
9:24-27 512
10:1-5 186
10:4 662
10:7-14 871
10:1-13 186, 663
10:16-17 522
10:32 171
11 427, 431
11-14 1283
11:2-16 187-8, 190-1, 432
11:4-5 190
11:5 514
11:7-10 186
11:14-15 190
11:16 187
11:17-34 709
11:18 711
11:20 711
11:23-36 480
12 389, 392
12-14 191, 1283
12:3 163 n. 35, 641
12:4-11 192
12:12-26 967
12:13 59, 188-90, 496
12:23 211
12:26 211
12:28 514, 939
13:1 777
14 709
14:3-5 190
14:23 711
14:23-25 190-1
14:33-35 432
14:34 428
15 667
15:3-4 100
15:3-5 641-2, 664f
15:12 191
15:22 538, 1210
15:32 806
15:50 675
16:1 187
16:1-4 186-7, 427, 453
16.6 463
16.6-7 463
16:11 464
16:13 447
16:15 447, 708, 709
16:19 447, 707, 709
16:20 886
16:21 1055
16:33 163 n. 35

2 Corinthians

1:21–22 496
 3:6 232, 681
 5:17 232
 5:19 308, 311
 6:8 211
 6:16 871
 7:12 453
 7:15 464
 8:16–24 470
 9:1–3 427
 9:3–5 470
 11:13 141
 11:22 141, 194
 11:24 142, 182
 11:24–5 188
 11:26 462
 11:27 184
 12:1 184
 12:7 184
 13:12 886

Galatians

1:6–9 186
 1:7–9 141
 1:11–17 180
 1:13 178, 185, 194
 1:15–16 186
 1:17 179
 1:22 178
 1:23 178
 2:1–10 139, 173
 2:1–14 179
 2:3 141
 2:3–4 139
 2:4 141
 2:6 161 n. 14
 2:7 141
 2:9 139
 2:9–10 187
 2:10 161 n. 14, 163 n. 39
 2:11–14 186, 193
 2:11–21 136, 140, 161 n. 14
 2:12 140, 162 n. 19
 2:12–13 140
 2:14 136, 139, 140
 2:16 144
 2:19–20 186
 3:1–3 150
 3:1–5 141, 186, 191
 3:2–5 186
 3:6–4:31 149
 3:10 144

3:10–14 534
 3:27 496
 3:27–29 171
 3:28 187, 188, 190, 192, 434, 932
 4:3 58
 4:4–5 68
 4:8 188
 4:10 68
 4:12–15 184
 4:21–31 186
 4:28 680
 5:1–12 150
 5:2–12 141, 162 n. 20
 5:11a 179–82
 5:12 141
 5:13ff. 144
 5:13–15 186
 5:14 194
 5:18 144
 5:19–21 389
 5:20–21 871
 6:11 1055
 6:12–15 141, 162 n. 20
 6:15 232

Ephesians

1:1 194
 1:13–14 496
 1:20 641
 2:8 969
 2:8–9 192
 4:16 967
 5:5 871
 5:21–33 190, 412
 5:21–6:9 190
 5:23–32 523
 5:25–27 512, 966
 6:5 447
 6:11–17 1097
 6:18 485
 6:21–22 470

Philippians

1:1 317, 508, 513, 514
 2:5–11 988
 2:6–8 611
 2:9 994
 2:11 641
 2:25–30 476
 3:2–4 162 n. 20
 3:2–7 141
 3:5 179, 194

3:6 178
4:2-3 188, 427
4:3 422, 428
14:15 427
4:16 453
4:18 427

Colossians

1:15 529
1:15-16 996
2:6 641
2:11-12 192, 964
2:12-15 496
2:16-20 194
3:9-10 496
3:11 190
3:17 484
3:18-4:1 190, 412
3:18 190, 523
3:22 447
4:2 485
4:15 427, 708, 709
4:18 1055

1 Thessalonians

1:9 188
1:9-10 871
4:13-5:11 189
4:14 641
5:17 484, 784
5:26 886

2 Thessalonians

3:17 1055

1 Timothy

1:17 211
2 236
2:5ff. 641, 642
2:11-12 191
2:12 448
2:11-14 412
2:15 191
3:1 317
3:1-7 376
3:1-13 412
3:16 236, 641
4:1-4 413
5 236
5:1-6 412
5:3-7 191-2
5:7 191

5:11-15 191
5:14 191-2
5:17 211
6:1 211
6:13ff. 641
6:20 908

2 Timothy

1:9-10 192
2:18 191
2:20 211
4:1 641
4:7 960, 972
4:13 1161
4:17 806

Titus

1:5 317
1:5-7 317
2:1-10 412
2:3-5 191
2:3-8 191
3:5-7 496

Philemon

2 447, 707
19 1055
22 463, 709

Hebrews

1:1ff. 150
1:3 563
1:4 988
1:14 586
2:7 211
3 994
3:1-2 988
3:3 150, 211
4:14 641
4:14-10:25 150
6:1-12 150
6:4 496
8:13 150
9:1-28 150
10:1 150
10:23-25 150
10:29 150
10:32 496
10:32-12:13 150
11:1 676
12:4 150
12:24 150

13:4 211
13:9 150
13:22–25 511
13:24 150

James

1:1 143, 144, 815
1:5 144
1:9–11 144
1:25 144
2:1 144
2:1–7 144
2:8 144
2:8–11 144
2:8–26 144
2:12 144
2:14–26 144
3:13–17 144
4:8 511
4:11–12 144
5:1–6 144

1 Peter

1:1 815
1:7 211
1:14 148
1:14–19 870
1:15 149
1:14–15 871
1:18 148
1:18–19a 871
1:21 641
2:4–10 148
2:9 148, 232, 496
2:11–12 870
2:12 821, 873
2:18 447
3:1–6 523
3:15 821
3:16–17 873
3:18ff. 641
3:19–21 964
3:6 148
4 1015
4:2–4 870
4:3–4 148
4:4 870
4:13–14 871
4:14 873
4:16 137, 821
5:13 149
5:14 886

2 Peter

1:1 149
1:16–18 192
1:17 211
1:17–18 149
1:19–21 192
2:1–3 192
2:1–3:3 149
2:10 192
2:10–12 192
2:13–16 192
2:18–19 192
2:18–22 192
3:2 192
3:3–7 192
3:14–16 192
3:15–16 149
3:15–17 236
3:17 192

1 John

2:20 496
2:22 641
2:27 496
3:11 223
3:13 219
4:1–3 970
4:2 251
4:15 641
4:20 223
4:21 223
5:5 641
5:21 871

2 John

1 447
7 251, 711
10 710

3 John

9–10 233, 710

Jude

1 144
3 145
4 144
4–18 149
5–16 144
14–15 337

17 145
17-25 144
20 145

Revelation

1-3 240
1:9 506, 522
1:13-14 1054
2-3 870, 872
2:6 192
2:8-11 553
2:9 821
2:10 506
2:13 506, 821
2:14-16 871
2:15 192
2:17 873
2:20-25 871

3:1-4 871
3:5 874
3:7-13 936
3:10 874
3:12 874
4:9 211, 237
4:11 211
5:12 211
6:9-10 821
7:3 496
7:9-17 1062
13 872
13:1-10 872
14:9-12 872
19:1 211
19:7 211
21:8 871
21:26 211
22:15 871

INDEX OF CLASSICAL REFERENCES



Achilles Tatius

The Story of Leucippe and Cleitophon

2.33.1 468

3.3.1–5.5 467

5.7 467

5.15.3 468

21.7–16.6 1268

21.16.18 454, 600

22.1.2 1256, 1258

22.4.3 1268

22.5.1–5 1253, 1268

22.5.2 1268

22.7.6 278

22.9.15 1254

22.12.6–7 1256, 1260, 1269

22.12.7 1268

22.13.1 1269

22.20.7 277

23.1 102

23.1.2 1256

23.1.2–3 1256

23.1.7 1269

23.2 102

23.2.7 1260

23.3.3 1256

23.3.6–7 1258, 1260

23.5.4–5 1260

23.5.8–9 1259

23.5.10 1260

23.5.11 1260

23.5.12–14 1260, 1269

24.4.27 1266

25.2.3 1256

25.2.4 1256

25.2.7–8 1260, 1269

25.3.1–23 1260

25.3.9 1256

25.4.1–3 1267

25.4.5–6 1267

25.4.7 1267

25.4.8–14 1267

25.4.16 1267

25.4.17 1267

25.4.18 1267

25.4.20 277, 1254

Aelius Aristides

Orations

27 463–4

36 453

Sacred Tales

2.49–50 454

2.60–62 463

2.61 463

3.6–7 454

4.83 454

6.1 454

Aetius

1.7.33 533

Ammianus Marcellinus

History

15.7.7. 600

16.10.13 35

20.4.1–2 1252

20.4.14 1252

20.10–11 1268

21.1.6 1258

21.2.3–4 1267

25.5.2 272
 25.5.3 272
 25.5.10–11 1269
 27.3.12–15 271
 27.8.1ff 281
 29.5.6 281
 29.6 462
 30.9.5 279
 31.13 279

Apuleius

Apologia

25–8 884
 42–7 884

Metamorphoses

1.5 453, 463
 1.7 462
 1.11 463
 1.21–23 464
 1.26 469
 2.12–13 463
 2.21 453
 4.4 462
 5.29 71
 8.15–7 463
 9.8 463
 9.14 877, 878, 886
 9.32 462
 9.36 463
 10.1 464
 11.2 71
 11.5 71
 11.15 71
 11.16 71
 11.21 71
 11.22 70
 11.25 71
 11.28 462

Aristotle

De caelo

297b 8

Nicomachean Ethics

8.14 21

Politics

8.3.4 884

Arrian

Anabasis of Alexander

7.11 60

Artemidorus

2.12 468
 2.17 468
 2.23 468
 3.5 463
 3.38 468
 3.54 463
 3.65 468

Athenaeus

5.207 468

Augustus

Res Gestae

15–24 19
 15.2–3 20
 34.1 35

Aulus Gellius

7.14.2–4 211

Aurelius Victor

De Caesaribus

39.26 1069
 42.9–12 102

Cicero

De divinatione

2.4.84 468

De officiis

1.42 383

Epistulae ad Familiares

12.10.2 452

Commentariolum Petitionis

8.31 19
 10.38 19

In Vatinius interrogatio

6.14 884

Natura Deorum

1.39–41 533

On the Ends of Good and Evil

3.74 64

Pro Archia

23 90

Timaenus

I 65

Corpus Juris

10.40.7

Dio Cassius

Epitome

37.30 883

69.12 84

Diodorus Siculus

I.25.4 70

18.4.4 60

Diogenes Laertius

I.12 66

I.13 65

I.16 63

7.183 64

8.4 66

10.122–135 63

Epictetus

Discourses

I.14.6 65

2.8.11ff. 548

2.14.11–13 382

2.23.36 463

Epitome de Caesaribus

39.6 1070

40.10 1070

41.4 1072

41.20 1082

Eunapius

Lives of the Philosophers

456 850

473 1267

475 1267

475–76 1256, 1269

476 1252, 1269

478 1268

Lives of the Sophists

462 1079

Galen

De sanitate tuenda

I.8 407

De usu partium

I4 409

Plato Arabus

I.99 308

Quod animi

4 407

Herodotus

Histories

I.134 212

I.216 886

2.145 69

2.42 69

2.48 69

2.67 76

3.38 886

3.99 886

4.26 886

4.36 8

4.42 7

4.64 886

4.106 886

6.44.3 467

Hesiod

Works and Days

619–25 7

Homer

Odyssey

4.561–569 68

Homeric Hymn to Demeter

184 67
475 67

Horace

Sermones

1.5.14–17 463

Isocrates

Panegyricus

28 67

Julian

Contra Galilaeos

39A 1260
39B 1261
42E–43A 1265
43A 1265
43B 1265
44A–B 1263
49A–B 1266
49C–D 1263
52B–C 1262
57C–D 1263
65B–C 1263
65D 1263
66A 1263
69C 1262, 1263
75A 1263
75B 1263, 1264
89A 1263, 1264
93E 1264
94A 1264
99E 1265
100A 1261
100C 1263
106B 1261, 1265
106C 1256, 1261
106D 1265
106E 1263
115D–E 1263
116A 1261
116A–B 1263
138C 1256, 1261
141C–D 1265, 1266
141D 1265
143B–C 1263
148B–C 1263
152B–D 1263
155C–D 1263
155E 1263

159E 1261
160D 1263
160E 1262
161A 1263
168C 1263
171D 1263, 1266
171E 1266
176A–B 1266
178A–B 1266
190C 1266
191D–E 1265
191E 1262
194B 1255
194B–C 1266
194C 1265
194D 1261
197C 1261
198B–C 1269
200A–B 1267
201E 1261, 1265
202A 1265
205E 1261
206A 1261, 1265
213A 1260
213B 1269
213B–C 1260
218A–B 1260
218B 1265
222A 1266
224C–D 1266
224E 1265, 1266
229C 1264, 1265, 1266
229D 1261, 1264
230A 1264, 1265
230A–B 1264
230A–B 1264
235B–D 1267
235C 1266, 1269
238A 1261
238A–B 1264
238B 1264, 1265
238C–D 1265
238D–E 1265
245A–C 1265
245D 1265
253A–B 1265
253B–E 1262
254B 1265
261E 1262
262B–C 1262
262B–D 1262
262D 1262
276E 1261
276E–277A 1262
290C–D 1262

291A 1262
 306A–B 1266
 314C 1265
 314D–E 1265
 319D–E 1265
 320 1262
 320B–C 1262
 327A 1265
 327A–C 1262
 327B 1265
 333D 1261
 335B 1261
 335B–C 1265
 335D 1262
 339A–C 1261
 340A 1265
 343C 1265
 351A 1265
 351B 1265
 354A–B 1265
 358E 1258
 Frag. No. 1 1265
 Frag. No. 2 1269
 Frag. No. 3 1269
 Frag. No. 4 1269
 Frag. No. 5 1261

Letters

2 1267
 3 1266
 4 1256
 6 1255
 9 1256
 18 1269
 19 1265
 20 1254, 1255, 1265, 1268
 22 1254, 1269
 23 1267, 1269
 24 1268
 26 1268
 29 1269
 36 1254, 1266
 37 1254
 38 1269
 40 1253
 41 1265, 1268
 46 1268
 47 1261, 1264, 1265, 1268
 51 1257, 1269
 55 1261, 1265
 56 1255
 58 1258
 60 1267
 147 1261

The Caesars

329b–d 1082

Julius Caesar

Bellum Iudaicum

4.5 469

Julius Paulus

Collected Sentences

5.21 428

Justinian

Code

1.9.3 1077
 1.13.1 270
 1.27.1 1077
 3.12.2 1077

Digest

29.1.24 32
 31.10 459

Latin Panegyrics

11.10.4–5 36

Law of Irni

93 39

Libanius

Epistles

1098 453
 1411 422

Orations

1.31 468
 1.205–11 1146
 12.3 1267
 12.44–46 1268
 12.65 1268
 12.69 1255, 1268
 12.76 1260
 12.80 1267
 12.80–82 1252
 12.82 1252
 12.94 1267
 12.95 1267
 13.8 1267

13.12 1267
13.13 1267
13.14 1255
13.24–32 1268
13.48–49 1255
13.49 1259
14.30 1082
15.8 1254
15.8–19 1254
15.19 1254
15.21 1254
15.53 1255
15.70 1254
15.67 1252
17.4 1252
17.9 1268
17.18 1268
17.23 1260
17.30 1269
18.8 1267
18.10–11 1267
18.18 1268
18.23 1252
18.24–27 1268
18.30 1267
18.55 1268
18.75–91 1269
18.118 1268
18.122–24 1268
18.126 1268
18.148 1254
18.161 1252
18.178 1256, 1260
18.180 1256
18.195–96 1254
21.15–16 471
28.92–117 1252

Livy

History of Rome

39.6.7 775
42.4 469

Lucian of Samosata

Alexander the False Prophet

15 72
26 72
38 878
38–40 72

Juppiter Tragoedus

48 468

Toxaris

20 468

Lucretius

On the Nature of Things

5.1–54 63

Macrobius

Saturnalia

1.16.8 467–8

Marcus Aurelius

Meditations

10.6 65

Menander

On Military Matters

3 33

Menander Rhetor

Treatise

2:369.17–370.10 214

2:371.1–372.2 222

Mosaicarum et Romanarum Legum Collatio

15.3 258

Musonius Rufus

Discourses

12 409

14 409

Origo Constantini imperatoris

2.2 1071

6.35 1082

Orosius, Paulus

History Against the Pagans

7.2 26

Ovid

Ars Amatoria

3.35 1058

Panegyrici Latini

6[7]2 1072

6[7]7.5 1071

6[7]21.3–6 837

10[2]11.4 1070

Pausanias

1.38.3 67

10.32.8f. 870

Petronius

Satyricon

100.6 468

103–105 468

Philochorus

Fragment 35 68

Philostratus

Imagines

1.19.3 468

Vita Apollonii

1 863

1.20 465

2 863

5 863

6 863

6.25 886

7–8 863

7.9 884

8.14 468

Plato

Phaedo

109C 7

Republic

379A 675

399d 775

588A–589B 926

Theaetetus

176B 65

Timaean

22f. 846

28C 860

30B 1263

41A–C 1263

Plautus

Poenulus

507 465

Pliny the Elder

Natural History

6.25 462

7.9–10 884

19.1.3–4 465

35.31 468

35.49 468

36.5 464

Pliny the Younger

Epistulae (Letters)

1.3.2 453

1.16.6 1055

2.11 43

3.19.4 453

4.14.8 453

5.19 454

7.6 43

7.10 43

7.21 462

7.29 42

8.6 42

9.15.3 453

10.96 243, 836, 1064 n 12

10.96–97 37, 243, 822, 836, 877, 878, 879,
881, 886, 1052

10.96.5 822

10.97 822, 836

10.97.2 869

Plotinus

Enneads

1.6.2 65

2.3.9 65

2.9 908

2.9.10 76

2.9.16 65
2.9.18 65
2.19 76
3.3.1 65
3.5.1 65
4.3.1 65
4.4.45 65
5.5.1 65
5.18.12 65
6.9.7 65

Plutarch

Alexander

2 58

Cicero

865–66 883

Conjug. Prae

141B 886

Dion

3.3 886

Fortune of Alexander

1.329C–D 60

Isis and Osiris

28 70

Life of Pompey

24 72

Moralia, Table-Talk

1.2: 615D 212

Moralia

4.266 225
122C–E 407
360C 308
532B–C 463

Non Posse

1100 211

Numa Pompilius

21.2 213

Precepts of Statecraft

17 27

Themistocles

13.3 468

Polyaenus

3.10.2 468

Porphyry

De abstinentia

2.49.1 850

De antro nymphaeum

5–6 74

15 74

18 74

20 74

24 74

Epistle to Marcella

4 850

18 850

Life of Plotinus

3 863

4 850

11 850

12 66

14 863

16 76, 908, 926

17 863

20 863

23 850

23.12–14 863

Procopius

De aedificiis

5.3.12–3 458

5.5 463

Historia arcana

30.3 471

Pseudo-Plato

Axiochus

371D 68

Ptolemy

Tetrabiblos

3.1 57

Quintilian

Inst. Orat.

3.7.10–18 213

Sallust

Catiline

22 883

Seneca

Epistles

40.1 469

41.1 548

120.14 548

Sirmondian Constitutions

4 1077

Soranus

Gynaikeia

1.27–32 409

1.30 409

1.32 409

1.42 409

Stobaeus

1.25–27 533

Strabo

Geography

1 7

2.5.10 9

4.6.6 462, 463

15.1.56 886

Suetonius

Augustus

32 462

49.3 471

Caesar

16.25 840

Claudius

42.2 90

Nero

10.1 879

16.2 821, 874, 878

Titus

1 80

Sulpicius Severus

Chronicle

2.47.6 282

2.48.5 282

2.49.3 282

2.50.7 282

Symmachus

Relatio

3 283

3.2 280

3.4 280

Tacitus

Annals

1.17 33

2.69 886

4.36 872

4.52 884

13.32 427

15.44 840, 874

Histories

1.4 30

4.54.2 84

5.13.2 84

5.5 92

5.5.3 820, 835

Theodosian Code (Codex Theodosianus)

1.13.1 270

1.27.1 270

4.56.3 464

8.5.38 472

15.4 285

15.14.7 285

15.5.66 851

16 36, 947

16.1 36

16.1.2 284, 1188

16.1.3 284

16.1.4 1190

16.2.1 37

16.2.2 12
 16.2.20 269
 16.4.1 283
 16.5 284
 16.5.4 945
 16.5.5 281, 1188
 16.5.6 284, 1188
 16.5.8 284
 16.5.52 959
 16.6.4 962
 16.8.1 102
 16.8.6 102
 16.8.8 103
 16.8.11 103
 16.8.13 103
 16.8.14 86
 16.8.15 103
 16.8.22 103
 16.8.29 86, 103
 16.9.2 102
 16.10 278, 285, 286
 16.10.1 278
 16.10.5 276
 16.10.7 285
 16.10.10 286
 16.10.20 280
 16.10.24 731

Thucydides

1.95.1 59
 3.82 59
 8.54, 65 59

Ulpian

Digesta
 3.2.4.2 464

23.2.43.1 464
 23.2.43.9 464

Tituli

23.10 32

Vegetius

1.9 33

Victor, Sextus Aurelius

Liber de Caesaribus

42.9–12 102

Xenophon

Ephesiaca

1.2.2–3 870

Zonaras

13.2.7 1072

Zosimus

New History

2.12 848
 2.34 1081
 4.3.3 278
 4.36 280
 4.39 269
 4.53 287
 5.41 287

INDEX OF JEWISH REFERENCES



Josephus

Against Apion

1.1 215
2.79–80 878
2.91–102 878
2.140 93
2.204 225

Jewish Antiquities

1.8 215
1.207–12 93
4.211 225
5.63 125
7.130 93
12.285 93
14.190–216 124
17.318–20 124
18.107 120
18.119 118
18.252–255 119
18.273–4 124
19.300–305 702
20.38–40 181
20.38–46 181
20.200 141

Jewish War

2.259ff 122
2.285–9 702
2.561 81
2.427 84
3.35–39 113
3.42–43 122
3.506–21 122
4.105 125
5.214 58
6.301–9 130

6.312–13 84

7.1.1 27
7.1.3 32
7.3.1 27
7.368 81

Life

15 468
33ff. 119
63 124
74ff. 122
80 124
81 118
102 121
119ff. 119
277–80 702
198 118
348 124
386 121
392 121
394 120
430 215

Midrashim

Genesis Rabbah

55.7 97

Shirata

4.19–29 92

Shirata

6.64–66 88

Midrash Kobelet

9B 684

Midrash Samuel

45B 684

Pesikta

49B 684

Sifre Deuteronomy

28 97

Mishnah

m. Aboth

I 86

m. Arakin

9.6 120

m. Berakhot

3.3 99

4.1 99

4.3 99

m. Shabbat

I.4 740

Philo

Abr.

184 211

Ad Gaium

16.117 819

24.157 835

29.192 835

32.229-230 819

45.356 835

Conf. 18

De plant.

73-89 93

De specialibus legibus

2.62 702

2.62-63 94

De Vita Mosis

2.215-6 702

In Flaccum

43 81

5.26 465

Opif.

4 546

170-172 546

Pseudo-Philo

Biblical Antiquities

9 795

10.7 684

Commentary on Habbakuk

1.10-15

Prayers

Eighteen Benedictions

10-14 99

13 93

Pseudepigraphia

2 Baruch

41.4-6 93

42.3 93

1 Enoch

106 795

2 Enoch

71 795

4 Ezra

3.1 91

7.36-38 91

7.70-74 91

7.79-101 91

11-12 91

Jubilees

11.18-24 797

Letter of Aristeeas

32 67

307 67

310-311 67

Sibylline Oracles

5 84

Testament of Naphtali

8.3ff. 89

Qumran

4Q Pesher Nahum

2.12 670

1QS (the Community Rule from Qumran)

3.13–4.26 513

3.20–21 147

Talmud, Babylonian

b. Berakhot

28b 99

b. Megillah

9b 90

b. Menaboth

41b 740

b. Sanhedrin

43a 101

b. Sanhedrin

100b 87

b. Sukkah

51b 94

Talmud, Palestinian

j. Megillah

1.2 89

1.71c 90

116 170

j. Shabbat

12.3 86

13c 86

Targums

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan

On Gen. 11.1 89

On Gen. 35 101

On Gen. 42:23 89

On Gen. 45:12 89

On Num. 24:19–24 92

Tosephta

Tosephta Eduy

3.4 85

Tosephta Sukka

3.11ff 684

INDEX OF PATRISTIC REFERENCES



Acta (of Perpetua and Felicitas)

1.1 1051
5.2–6.1 1054
9.5 1051

Acta Saturnini

16 817

Acts of John

61 800
73 800
86 800
97–102 807, 809

Acts of Marcellus

5 837

Acts of Paul and Thecla

6 415
7–9 881
8–15 878
12 415
15 877
20 877, 878
21

Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs

2 824, 1064, n 13

Acts of Thomas

11–15 414–15

Aetius

Syntagmation

32 995
37 995

Ambrose

De excessu fratris

1.20 1184

De fide

1–2 1186–7
2.136–43 1187

De incarnatione

70–116 1189

De obitu Valentiani consolatio

71–81 1189

De officiis

1.1–4 1181
1.72 1184, 1190, 1199
1.86 1189
1.185 1189
2.70–75 1185
2.125 1189
2.136–43 1185
3.59 1189

De paenitentia

2.67 1182
2.72–73 1182

De Spiritu Sancto

1 1187
1.19–21 1187

De virginibus

1.1–4 1181
1.11.63 446
1.32 1184
2.1–5 1181

Epistles

(PL Sequence)

17.9 269
18.31 269
20 283
22 283
40 285
40.6–7 731
41 285
41.25–28 731
42.3 423
51 285
63

(CSEL Sequence)

30[24] 1189
74[40] 1194
74[40].8 1194
75[21] 1192
75a [C. Aux] 1192
75a [C. Aux].16 1190
75a [C. Aux].22 1190
75a [C. Aux].24 1190
75a [C. Aux].29 1190
76[20].2 1191
76[20].8 1191
76[20].19 1191
77[22]16–23 1193

Epistles Extra Collectionem

1[41] 1194
4[10]–6[12] 1188
5 [11].3 1185
10[57] 1195
12[1].2 1186
14[63].65 1182

Exhortatio Virginitatis

1–10 1195

Explanatio psalmi

1.9 786

Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam

7.28–31 1186
7.44–53 1186

In Psalm 61 enarratio

23–26 1189

Ambrosiaster

Commentarium in Epistula 1 ad Tim.

3.8–11 932

Anthony of the Desert

Letters

1 1099
1.18–34 1095
1.46–71 1095
1.77 1096
2 1095
2–7 1090
2.23 1095
3.6 1091
4 1091
4.17–18 1093
5.1–2 1091
6 1090, 1099
6.2 1091
6.5–6 1095
6.33–39 1099
6.50 1098
6.51 1098
6.51–3 1095
6.56–62 1095
6.78 1091
6.84 1095
6.91–92 1099
7 1095
7.5 1091
7.58 1091

Sayings

1 1100
6 1096
8 1095
9 1099
10 1099
13 1095
21 1099
31 1100

Apocryphon of John

2.1.9.11–22 75

Apophthegmata Patrum

Ammonathas 1 452
Arsenius 28 455

Apostolic Constitutions

7 484
8 489

Apollinaris

Fragments 70–2 594

Aristides of Athens

Apology

2 232

Arius

Epistula ad Alexandrum Alexandrinum

3 583

Arnobius of Sicca

Adversus nationes

1.1 841

1.26 848

2.42 775

Asterius the Sophist

Fragments

xiii 989

xxi 989

xxvii 989

xxviii 989

xxxii 989

Athanasius

Apologia ad Constantium

14–15 1116

Contra Gentes

2 584

2–4 1121

8 584

26 1126

34 584

De decretis

14 586

De incarnatione

2–3 584

3 584

4–5 1121

13–16 1122

21 585

25 1122

37 1125

44 584

45 1120

48 1123

50 1123

51 1123

54 585, 1120

De synodis

15 979, 981

Epistulae virginibus

1 1110

1.8 1123

1.23 1123

2 1113

Festal Index

4 1108

6 1108

10 1110

41–42 1110

Festal Letters (Epistulae festales)

1.3 1108

1.7 1108

3.2–5 1123

6.3 1123

6.11–12 1123

10.1 1100

10.4 1123

10.5 1123

10.9 1110

19.7 1123

39 1118, 1122

40 1118

41 1109, 1119

42 1119

Historia Arianorum

61 1117

Letter to Serapion

1.16 1120

1.17 1120

1.23 586

1.24 586

1.27 586

2.2 1120

3.1 586

Life of Anthony

1.2 1092

3.1–2 1096

3.2 1093

3.7 1092

4.1 1092, 1096, 1099

4.4 1099

5 1097

6 1097

— *Index of Patristic References* —

- 7.3 1097
 7.6 1095, 1096
 7.11 1096
 7.12 1096
 8 1097
 8-9 1097
 9.3 1099
 11.1-2 1093
 11.3-4 1099
 12-13 1093
 12.3 1093
 13 1097
 13.5 1099
 13.7 1099
 14 325, 1100, 1123
 14.2 1099
 14.3-4 1095
 14.4 1099
 14.6 1099
 14.7 1095
 16-43 1097
 16.1 1097
 16.3 1096
 16.4-8 1096
 17.2 1099
 17.7 1099
 19.2-3 1096
 20.1-2 1095, 1096
 22.3 1095
 25 1098
 27.4 1098
 28-29 1098
 28.3-5 1098
 30.2 1096, 1099
 31-32 452
 33.2-6 1098
 35 1097
 35.1 1098
 35-36 1098
 35.2 1099
 37.4 1099
 38.5 1099
 39.2 1099
 39.3 1099
 39.6 1099
 40.2 1099
 40.5 1099
 41.1-4 1095
 41.2 1099
 41.6 1099
 42 1098
 43 1099
 44.2 1092, 1096, 1099
 44.2-4 1095
 45.1 1096
 45.2-7 1095
 46-47 1100
 47.1 1096
 47.2 1095, 1096
 48 1099
 49-50 1093
 50.7 1095
 50.8-9 1095
 51.1 1095, 1096
 51.2-5 1097
 52.3 1099
 53.1 1096
 53.2 1099
 55 1096, 1099
 55.5-13 1096
 55.9 1099
 55.9-12 1092
 56-58 1099
 57-58 1093
 58.3 1092
 59.2 1095
 60 452
 63.3 1099
 65-66 1122
 67 1100
 67.4-8 1099
 67.6-8 1095
 69-70 1100
 69-71 1110
 70.4 1099
 73.3 1092
 73.4 1099
 74-79 1093
 74-80 1092
 74.2 1092
 77.1 1092
 80.4 1099
 81.1 1100
 81.4 1092
 81.5-6 1099
 82.3 1095
 84.1 1099
 84.3-5 1093
 85.1-4 1093
 85.3-4 1099
 85.5 1092
 86 1090, 1100
 87 1099
 87.3 1099
 89.4 1096
 91 1114
 91.2 1096
 91.3 1096
 91.8-9 1096
 92 1095

93.1 1096
93.4 1092
94 1098

Orations against the Arians (Contra Arianos)

1.5 1110
1.5–6 979, 981, 982
1.14 1120
1.19 1120
1.24 1120
1.6 1125
2.69 983, 1122
3.3–4 585
3.30 594
87.1 1117

Tomus ad Antiochenos

6 1113
7 1122

Athenagoras

Legatio

1 885
3 877
4 540, 541, 542
6 542
7 540
8 540, 542
9 540
10 540, 541, 542
11 540
12 540, 541
13 540
14 540
15 540
16 540, 541
18 541
19 541
21ff. 541
22 540
23 540
24 541, 542
24ff. 542
25 541
29 540
30 540, 541
32 541
35 541

De resurrectione

1–11 541
12 542
12–25 541

15 542
15ff. 542
16 542
25 541

Augustine

Against the Letters of Pelagius

2.21 1219

City of God (De civitate Dei)

2.26 870
7.25 851
8.12 851
10 1224
10.10 851
10.28 851
10.29 851
10.31 851
10.32 863, 1222
18 316
18.53 1255
18.54 1258

Confessions

1–9 619, 1206
1.11 488
3.5.9 1214
5.8 453, 468
5.13 453
5.13.23 1182
5.14.24 618
6.3.3 1184
6.5.6 681
6.5.8 681
7.9.13 1207
7.21 472
8 363, 1208
8–12.28–30 621
8.12.29 1208
8.29 300
9.6.14–7.15 786
9.7.15 1191
9.9.2 1212
9.10–13 730
10 494, 1208
10.27 1208
10.29.30 626
10.30.45 626
10.33.49–50 787
10.37.60 626
11–13 1206

Contra Cresconium

2.7.9 962

2.13 323
2.18.22 965
2.22.27 965
3.43.47 959, 961
3.49.54 961
4.61.74 967

Contra epistolam Parmeniani

1.1 967

Contra Gaudentium

1.28.32 958, 961
1.29.33 959
1.38.51 961

Contra litteras Petiliani

2.3.6 965
2.4.8 965
2.38.91 962
2.77.171 966
2.89.196 835
2.92.202 957
2.95.218 962
3.22.26 965

De doctrina christiana

Prologue 6 1224
2.16 1162
2.16.26 780
2.18.28 780
2.40.60 1224
3.30.42–37.56 967
3.33.46 969
4.8.22 682

De haeresibus

26–27 947
27 931
28 942
69 962, 963
86 943, 1029

De natura et origine animae

4.10.12 1056

Enarrationes in Psalmos

47.13 1064, n 17
124.5 964
132.3 960
132.6 960 972

Epistles

29.11 961
157 1225

185.1 962
185.12 961
211 364

Gesta cum Emerito

3 967

In psalmum

119.1 788
132.1–2 788

Letter to Simplicianus

2.17 1210
2.20 1210
2.21 1210

Literal Commentary on Genesis

9.3.6 1224
11 1224

On Baptism

4.18 1217

On Teaching the Uninstructed

10.15 1224

On the Trinity

8–15 1223

Retractiones

1.21.1 963
1.21.3 963

Sermo

37.33.3 964
165, *de verbis Apostoli, Ephesians* 3.13–18, 1 787
280 1054
280.1 1064, n 17
281.3 1065, n 20

Barnabas

Epistle

1–17 515
3.6 150
4.4 515
4.6–8 151
4.8 516
5.11 516
7.1–8.7 151
9.1–10.12 151
9.7–9 233
10.3–8 516
12.1–11 151

13.1 516
 14.1–4 151
 15.1–9 151
 16.1–2 151
 16.3–4 514
 16.4 150
 16.8 151
 17.2 515
 18–20 147
 18–21 513, 515
 19.4–5 515

Basil of Caesarea ('the Great')

Epistles

9 587
 48 471
 94 464
 188.1 939
 197.2 1183
 210 589
 214 589
 215 462
 234 588
 236 591
 361–64 587

On the Holy Spirit

1.3 590
 9 591
 16.38 593
 27.66 590

Clement of Alexandria

Excerpta ex Theodoto

56.3 926
 78.1–2 909

Exhortation to the Greeks

4 747

Paedagogus (The Educator)

2.1 715
 2.4 778
 3.11 467, 715
 4.10 422

Stromateis (Miscellanies)

2.11 926
 3.2.10 884
 3.3 237
 3.4.30 926

3.6.53 429
 3.57–58 415
 3.66–79 415
 4.4.8f. 926
 4.4.21f. 926
 4.13.93.1 929
 5.3.18 547
 6–7 926
 6.7 251
 6.9 251
 7.3 251
 7.5 715
 7.7–15 251
 7.17.108.1 929
 7.7.41 926

Clement of Rome

First Epistle to the Corinthians

1.3 523
 3.3 522
 5.4–5 508, 522
 6 434
 32.2 320
 34.7 99
 37 508
 42 508
 42.5 319, 816
 44.1–2 254
 44.1–5 270, 319
 44.3 508
 55 422
 57.1 508
 63.2 1306

Second Epistle to the Corinthians

1–2 512
 3–14 512
 7.1–5 512
 9.1–5 512
 14.1–2 512
 14.2–5 512
 15–18 512
 17.3 512
 19–20 512
 19.1 512
 19.2 511

Collectio Avellana

1.10 269

Concilium Carthaginensis

3.47 1064, n 16

Cyprian

Ad Donatum

16 782

Ad Fortunatum

11 817

De lapsis

8 836

Epistles

5.1 247

10.4 972

11.1 836

11.4.1–5.1 1061

12.2.1 1053

34.4 836

38.2 718

39.4.1 718

40 718

42.1 321

44.3 321

55.9 828

57.5.1 1061

58.6 817

59.18.1 718

62.4 829

63.14 483

64 480

65.2 321, 964

67.5 321

70 253

73.24.5 964

75 253, 929, 938

75.10 930

77.2–3 838

79 830

80 836

80.1 837

80.2 830

Cyril of Alexandria

Ep. 2 ad Nestorium 600

Ep. 3 ad Nestorium 600

Cyril of Jerusalem

Catechetical Lectures

16.8 929

Catecheses Mystagogicae

2.5 311

Didache

1–6 513

1.1–6.1 147

1.3–5 147

4.3 322

6.1 513

6.2–3 147

7 513, 645, 738

7–10 513

7–15 513

7.1 513

8 483, 485, 513

8.1 147

8.2 147

8.2–3 147

9 480, 482

9.5 513

10 99, 480, 482

10.7 318, 1308

11–15 513

11.1 513

11.7 318, 1308

11.7–13 514

12–14 710

12.2 514

13.3 318

14 483

15 514

15.1–2 514

16 513

Didascalia Apostolorum

11–12 396

12 719

23 322

Didymus

De trinitate

3.41.1 947

3.41.3 947

Encomium in s. Theodorum Siceotam

3 464

Ephrem the Syrian

Hymns against Heresies

26.10 1228

Hymns against Julian

1 1267

1.1 1245

1.1–2 1245

1.3 1245

1.4 1268

1.5 1245
1.8 1245
1.10–13 1245
1.13 1245
1.14 1267
1.16 1267
1.16–20 1245
1.18–20 1246
1.20 1245
2.1 1268
2.1–4 1245
2.2 1245
2.3 1268
2.6–9 1245
2.8 1260
2.10–11 1245
2.13 1245
2.15.6 1246
2.16.6 1246
2.22 1246
2.22–27 1246
2.24 1245
2.27 1268
3.14 1246
4.1 1245
4.2 1245
4.3 1246
4.5 1245
4.6 1246
4.8 1245
4.22 1258
4.23–25 1245

Hymns on the Church

25.18 1236

Hymns on the Nativity

1.92–96 1235
1.99 1235, 1249
3.7.1–5 1247
3.15 1247
3.16 1247
3.17 1236
4.182–185 1242
4.197–200 1237
8.2 1235
8.5 1235
8.13 1243
9.7–16 1243
11.8 1235
13.12–14 1236
13.2–5 1243

15.8 1243
16.12 1243
16.13 1243
16.16 1243
16.17 1243
18.35 1234
21.6 1233
21.8 1233
21.12 1233
21.13 1234
21.17 1233
22.5 1234
22.4–7 1234
23.12–13 1234

Hymns on Virginity

2.15 1241
4–7 1247
5.8.5–6 1247
8.8–10 1241–2
11.9 1248
11.12 1248
11.17 1248
11.20 1248
14 1248
16.2 1249
20.12 1232
22.21 1237
23.1.1–2 1237
23.1.3–8 1237
23.3 1237
23.4–5 1238
23.6 1238
23.7 1238–9
24.7.3–8 1241
25.2–3 1239
25.4 1240
25.8.1–4 1240
25.8.5–9.4 1240
25.9.5–8 1240
29.1 1232
31.13–14 1249
31.16 1248

Nisibene Hymns

2.2 1244

Epiphanius of Salamis

Panarion

21.1.1 444
29 157
29.1.1 163, n 46

29.6.7 157
 29.7.1 157
 29.7.2 157
 29.7.3 157
 29.7.4 157
 29.7.5 157
 29.7.6 158
 29.7.7–8 158
 29.9.2–3 157
 29.9.4 157, 158
 30 154
 30.1.1 158
 30.1.3–5 163, n. 38
 30.2.1 158
 30.2.1–6 163, n. 38
 30.2.6 154
 30.2.7 154
 30.3.7 155
 30.13.2 155
 30.14.2 155
 30.15.3–4 155
 30.16.5 155
 30.16.7–9 155
 30.18.2 154
 30.22.3–8 155
 30.26.2 155
 40.2.1–3 926
 48.1–13 929
 48.1.2 933
 48.1.3 932
 48.2.4 941
 48.4 939
 48.11.5–6 947
 48.12–13 431, 434
 48.12.1 932
 48.12.3 941
 48.12.4 941
 48.13.1 931, 935, 941
 48.14 931, 947
 49.1 434, 930, 931
 49.1–2 931, 942
 49.2 434, 932, 943, 947, 1066, n. 41
 49.2.1–5 932
 49.2–3 932
 51.33 931, 933, 945
 68.1–3 288
 68.3.8 259
 68.7.2 1103
 69.11.4 1103
 79.2 434
 79.7 433
 79.8 423, 433

Epistle to Diognetus

1 387

1–4 526
 5 526
 6 526
 7–9 526
 10–12 526

Eunomius of Cyzicus

Expositio Fidei

3 996

First Apology

7 996
 9 996
 12 996
 15 996
 18 996
 20 996
 23 996
 24 996
 25 996
 28 996

Second Apology (Apologia apologiae)

224 996
 382 996

Fragments

ii 996

Eusebius (Pamphili) of Caesarea

Contra Hieroclem

1 848
 2 849
 1–6 863
 4 862
 7–12 863
 13–15 863
 19 862
 33–40 863
 41–42 863

De ecclesiastica theologia

1.20.90 978

Demonstratio evangelica

5.1.20 978

Epistula ad ecclesiam Caesariensem

7 583

Historia Ecclesiastica

- 1.11.8 387
 1.13 241
 2.1.11f. 926
 2.13.1 926
 2.13.5 1310
 2.17.2 325
 2.23.5 156
 2.25.5-7 943
 3.1.2 148
 3.4.2 148, 162, n. 19
 3.5.3 141
 3.11 142
 3.17.1-6 386
 3.18 447
 3.25.1-7 240
 3.27.1-6 382
 3.27.2 154
 3.27.2-6 158
 3.31.3 318
 3.33.2-3 388
 4.3.1-2 526
 4.5.1-5 142
 4.7.10 387
 4.9 237, 869
 4.93 244
 4.15 448
 4.15.6 387
 4.15.15 824
 4.15.20 815
 4.15-46 520
 4.22.4 142
 4.23.11 512
 4.24.54
 4.26.10 878
 4.27 526, 936
 5.1 442
 5.1.1 823
 5.1.1-5.3.4 936
 5.1.7 885
 5.1.7-8 876
 5.1.7-63 244
 5.13 237
 5.1.14 876
 5.1.16 516, 876
 5.1.25-26 389
 5.1.26 325
 5.1.33 876
 5.1.38 876
 5.1.41 876
 5.1.44 824
 5.1.47 824
 5.1.53-54 436
 5.1.55 816
 5.1.56 876
 5.1.60 815
 5.1.62 815
 5.2 442
 5.2.3 816
 5.13 433
 5.14-19 252
 5.16 936
 5.16.1 936
 5.16.3 931
 5.16.4 932, 936, 947
 5.16.7 935, 938, 939
 5.16.9 932, 939
 5.16.13 938
 5.16.14 947
 5.16.17 941
 5.16.18 941
 5.17.2-3 947
 5.17.4 936
 5.18 319, 434
 5.18.1 938
 5.18.2 930, 935, 939
 5.18.3-4 938
 5.18.5-11 930
 5.18.13 938
 5.19.2 936, 947
 5.19.3 936, 938
 5.20.5 522
 5.20.6 553
 5.23-25 320
 5.24 546
 5.24.14-17 253
 6.1-3 245
 6.1-5 1009
 6.1.3-63 1048
 6.2 1008
 6.2.5 245
 6.5 432, 440
 6.8 1005, 1008, 1009
 6.11 454
 6.14-19 1009
 6.17 1010
 6.19 325, 850, 863, 1005
 6.20.3 943
 6.21 1009
 6.21.3 245
 6.23 1005
 6.23-32 1009
 6.25.3-4 239
 6.25.11 239
 6.25.14 239
 6.28 827
 6.28.1 245
 6.33.4 1008
 6.34.1 246
 6.36.2 844

6.36.3 1005
 6.36-39 1009
 6.39 1022
 6.39.1-4 246
 6.39.4 828
 6.39.5 246
 6.40.1 246
 6.41 827
 6.43.6 321
 6.43.11 829
 6.43.18 320
 7.5.1-6 253
 7.10.3 247, 829
 7.11.7 830, 836
 7.13 830
 7.13.1 247
 7.15 837
 7.18 762
 7.30.9 718
 7.30.19 321, 711
 7.30.19-21 837, 1074
 8.1.5 718
 8.1.9-2.5 718
 8.2.4 248, 837
 8.4.3f. 848
 8.6.1 247
 8.9 834
 8.11.1 832
 9.5 833
 9.7.1 833
 9.7.3-14 841
 10.2.1 726
 10.2.15-17 1077
 10.3.1 724
 10.4 583
 10.4.36-45 726
 10.4.40 728
 10.4.46-68 726
 10.5.2-17 248
 10.5.18 1079
 10.6 834
 10.6.7 1076

Martyrs of Palestine

1.1 837
 3 248
 3.1 837
 4.8 833
 5.3 863
 8.1 263, 832

Praeparatio Evangelica

4.6-7 1258

Vita Constantini

1.51 322
 2.44 1077
 2.50 848
 2.63-72 1080
 3.25-43 729
 3.41 274
 3.47 269
 3.49 762
 3.51-53 729
 4.18-19 271
 4.52 271
 4.54.2 268

Filastrius of Brescia

Div. haer. lib.

49 936

Firmicus Maternus

De errore profanarum religionum

13.4 849
 28.6 730

Gennadius

De viris illustribus

18 967

Gesta Conlotionis Carthaginensis

3.146 966
 3.193 962
 3.258 966
 3.261 962

Gospel of Truth

18.7-11 926
 24.28-25.19 926

Gregory of Nazianzus

Epistles

2.2 785
 58 590
 101 595

Orationes

4.67 1268

18.31 466
21 587
28 588
29.16 591
31.7–8 591
31.8 591
31.10 590
31.26 590–1
43 590
43.63 464

Poemata de seipso

11.145–147 468

Gregory of Nyssa

Catechetical Oration

Prologue

1 592
2 592–3
3 593
4 594

De Virginitate

14.1 416

De vita Moysis

2.163 588
2.238–39 588

Epistulae

2 462, 464

Heracleon

Fragment 46 926

Hermas

Visions

1.3 509
1.3.1 522
2.3.1 522
2.4.1 512
2.4.3 320, 509
3 510
3.5.1 510
3.6.1–3 510
3.6.2 511
3.6.5 511
3.6.6 510
3.11.3 522

Mandates

3.5 522
10.1.4 511
10.1.4–5 522

Similitudes

1 510
2 510
4.5 522
4.7 522
5.5 510
5.6–7.4 512
8 510
8.8.1 511
8.8.1–2 522
9.1.1 511
9.12 511
9.2–9 510
9.20.1 511

Hilary of Poitiers

Against the Jews

7 235

De synodis

15 991

Hippolytus

Apostolic Tradition

2–21 305
20 306
21 307
21–22 254
21–26 715
35.1 395
35.2–3 396
36.1 396
36.7 397
36.8 397

Commentary on Daniel

4.20 929, 931

Refutation of All Heresies (the Philosophumena)

5.6.4 908
5.7.8 926
6.35.5–7 926
6.42.2 922
7.20–27 1015
7.32 884
8.19 929, 931, 945, 947
8.19.2 434
9.6 252

9.7 926
9.8.1 235
9.12.14 751
9.9.1 235
9.12.24 435
10.25–26 929
10.26 931

History of the Monks in Egypt

15.1–2 1092

Ignatius of Antioch

Epistle to the Ephesians

3.2 254
4.1–2 778
6.1 254
7–9 919
14 919
17–20 919
20.2 317, 482

Epistle to the Magnesians

2.1–3.2 169
3.1–7.2 168
8.1–10.3 169
10.3 169
11.1–2 169

Epistle to the Philadelphians

6.1 504, 516, 518
7 517
7.2 1314
8.2 666
11.2 470

Epistle to Polycarp

2.2 1314
4 447
4.3 522
5 448
5.2 519, 523
6 517
6.1–7.1 519
8 428

Epistle to the Romans

4.1 518
4.3 522
5.2–3 244
6.1 517

Epistle to the Smyrneans

1–7 919

2–3 518
7.1 483
8 517
8.1 317
11 422
12.1 470

Epistle to the Trallians

3.1 317
6.2 317
7.2 517
9–11 919
10.1 518

Irenaeus

Adversus Haereses

1.1 1015
1.2–3 255
1.3.4 554
1.6.2 926
1.8.1 644
1.9.4 645
1.10.1 644, 666
1.10.2 241
1.11.1 921, 923
1.21.4 926
1.23–31 908
1.23.1 1314
1.24 1015
1.25 884
1.24.1–3 918
1.24.4–6 918
1.25.6 908
1.26.2 154, 235
1.27 237
1.28 537
1.29 920
1.30.11 920
1.30.15 908, 920
2 Praef. 908
2.14 1015
2.31 884
3.3 318
3.3.1 254, 554
3.3.4 553
3.11.8 239
3.11.12 945
3.15.1 154
3.21.1 154
3.23.8 537
4.6.2 531
4.25.3 387

4.26.1 387
4.28 387
4.33.7 644
4.33.8 254
5.36.3 684

Isidore of Pelusium

Epistles

1.456 776

Itinerarium Egeriae

4.3 313

Jerome

Against John of Jerusalem

23–26 1171

Against Jovinian

1.16 1155

1.26 1155

Apology against Rufinus

1.13 101

1.16 1166

2.34 101

3.22 1173

42–44 1005, 1020

Commentary on Daniel

2.45 1174

5.2 1169

Commentary on Ephesians

3.5.19 786

5.18 1174

Commentary on Galatians

2.1 1151

2.11 1170

4.6 1166

6.11 1160

Commentary on Isaiah

9.1–4 158

Commentary on Jeremiah

9:22 1158

17. 1–4 1167

Commentary on Matthew

13.44ff. 1168

13:35 1160

Commentary on Zechariah

3.14.10 161, n. 3

De viris illustribus

2 156, 158

3 1159

9 1165

11 1156

26 936

53 1027

54 246

70 234

75 1006

80 269

93 963

100 611

115 1248

135 469

Dialogue against the Luciferians

19 609

Epistles

3.5 1151

5.2 1173

7.5 1153

10.3 1159

15.2 324

18A.1 1168

18A.15 1170

22 1155, 1178

22.20 416

22.30 619, 1159, 1173

23 1178

29.9 441

30.7 1173

33 937

41 932, 945

41.4 939

46 1171

46.13 455

49 1164

53.8 1165

57.2 471

70 619

70.5 547

81 471

84 471, 1171

84.4 947

108 1153, 1178

108.6 441, 470

108.7 461, 463

108.7–14 1173

108.9 463

108.10 455
 108.14 463
 108.26 1154
 112.13 158, 160
 124.2 1172
 124.4 1172
 124.8 1172
 124.11 1172
 125.12 1158
 127 1178
 129.3 1174
 133.4 433

Life of Paul

14 452

Tractatus in Psalmos

77 1160

John Cassian

Conference

10.7.2

Institutes

2 494
 3 494

John Chrysostom

Ad viduam iuniorem

2 1139

Catechesis

8 1138, 1146

Cat. ad illuminandos

2 1142

Contra Anomoeos homiliae

11 1143

De incomprehensibili Dei natura homiliae

1-5 588
 2 1147

De mutatione nom. homiliae

3 1145

De poenitentia homiliae

3 1144, 1145

De proph. obsc. hom.

2 1136

De statuis homiliae

3 1138
 16 1140
 17 1139
 19 1138, 1142, 1146
 21 1138

De virginitate

24.2 472

Epistulae

1-17 1132
 4 1148
 6 1132, 1133
 9 1144
 18 1133
 29 1133
 33 1133
 34 1133
 43 1133
 52 1133
 60 1133
 62 1133
 79 1140
 94 1132
 95 1140
 104 1132
 124 1140
 132 1140
 168-9 1145
 170 1145
 190 1140
 193 1140
 194 1140
 197 1140
 203 1138
 204 1140
 212 1138
 220 1140
 222 1133
 227 1133
 232 1133
 234 1140
 239-241

In Acta Apostolorum homiliae

3 1134, 1145

In Col. homiliae

8 1142

In 1 Corinthios

Hom. 12.5 775

In Eph. epistula

PG 42.148 423

In Eph. homiliae

8.2 454

11 1136

12 1142

12.3 463

In Genesim homiliae

31.5 462

In Gen. Sermo

1 1144

8 1147

In Heb. homiliae

2.5 472

11 1148

15 1136

In illud: Vidi dom. homiliae

3 1141

In Matt. homiliae

1.7 453

7 1148

49–50 1148

69–70 1139

In princ. Actorum homiliae

1 1141, 1145

In 1 Thess. homiliae

5 1148

In 1 Tim. homiliae

14 1139

14.3 472

In 2 Tim. homiliae

8 1142

Nov. Hom.

2 1134, 1146

2–3 1134

6 1134

9 1146

10 1135, 1147

John of Damascus

De haeresibus

87 932

Justin Martyr

1 Apology

1 526

2 528, 534

2.2 869

3 528, 534

5–6 878

6 528, 529

8 528, 534

9 529

10 528, 529

12 528

13 528, 529

13.2 529

14 528, 534

15 535

15.14 528

16.7 528

17 528

20 528

21.1 530

22 530

23.2 529

24 535

25 529

26 237, 877, 908, 926

26.5 907

28 415, 531, 534

29 535

30.1 672

31 531, 535, 823

31.8 672

31–53 532

31.6 152

31.7 532, 665f.

32 531

32.4–8 668

34 531

35 531

37 531

46 528, 532

47–49 531

48 531

50 530

52 531

58 237

60 529, 531, 532

61 478, 529, 537, 658

61–67 710

63 531

65 478, 529, 535

66 528, 535

67 480, 535, 536, 782

68 534, 822, 878

2 Apology

- 2 436
- 2.4ff. 1059
- 3 534
- 6 529, 531
- 8–10 533
- 9 528
- 10 529, 530, 533
- 10.1 530
- 10.2 532
- 12 527
- 13 530, 533, 535
- 15 528

Dialogue with Trypho

- 1 528
- 2 536
- 3 528
- 4 529
- 5 529
- 8 536, 855
- 8.4 530
- 10 535
- 11 529, 530
- 11.2 532
- 11.4 530
- 13 529
- 15 530, 534
- 16 529, 531
- 20 534
- 21 534
- 22 534
- 25 532
- 30 530
- 32 531
- 35 534
- 36.2 532
- 38 531
- 40.1–3 670
- 42.1 530
- 45 531
- 46.1 153
- 47 150, 153, 154, 162 n. 20, 235
- 47.1 153
- 47.3 101
- 48 154, 158
- 48–49 153
- 56 233
- 58 528
- 61 538
- 80 908, 926
- 80.3 532
- 84.2 529
- 85.1 532
- 85.2 529

- 88 529
- 91 529
- 93 532, 534, 535
- 95 534
- 96.2 535
- 100 237, 531
- 100.2 529
- 102 530
- 104–105 237
- 105 530
- 105.1 529
- 108 531
- 115 530
- 117 531
- 119 233
- 125 530
- 125.3 529
- 128 538
- 128.3 529
- 129.4 529
- 132 530
- 133 531
- 136 530, 531
- 137 530
- 138 530
- 138.1f. 671
- 138.2 529
- 141 526
- 142.3 530

Justinian

Novella

- 146

Lactantius

Divine Institutes

- 5.1.21 547
- 5.2 848, 850, 862
- 5.22 837

On the Deaths of the Persecutors (De mortibus persecutorum)

- 2.7f. 848
- 3.1 837
- 6 837
- 7.3–4 40, 837
- 10.1–5 848
- 11 848
- 11–13 837
- 12 717, 726
- 15 248
- 16 848
- 18.8 1318

23.3-4 1071
24.9 262
31.2 1073
34 833
34.1 259
35 833
48.2 249
48.2-12 837

Martyrdom of Agapê, Irenê and Chionê

5 439

Martyrdom of Carpus, Papyrus and Agathonice

5 438

Martyrdom of Polycarp

2.1 504
2.2 1318
4.1 504
5 520
7 520
9 520
9.1 1318
9.2 520
10.1 244
12.1 504
12.2 520, 876, 878
13.1 504, 520
15.1-2 1318
16.1 520
17.2 504, 520
18.1 504, 520
21-22 520

Martyrium Pionii

4 836
15 836
16 828
21 828

Liber Pontificalis

34.9 762

Maternus

On the Error of Profane Religion

28.6 278

Melito of Sardis

Peri Pascha ('Paschal {or Passion} Homily')

35f. 670
69 234

81-82 234
90 234

Michael the Syrian

Chronicle

11 930

Minucius Felix

Octavius

5 547
6 547
8 547
8.4 878
8.4-5 877, 886
8.4-9.3 877
9 547, 836
10 547
11 548
12 548
13 548
16 548
17 548
18 548
20 547, 548
21 548
22ff. 548
24 548
26 548
27 548
28 548
29 548
30 548
30.3-4 886
31 548
32 548
33 548
34 549
37 549
38 549

Muratorian Canon

72 239
74 239
77-80 239
81-85 239

Niceta of Remesiana

De utilitate hymnorum

5 786

Novatian

De trinitate

27.12 963

Odes of Solomon

19 341

Optatus of Milevis

Against the Donatists

1.5 964

1.6 964

1.9.1 943

1.10 962

1.16–18 434

1.20 834

2.2 965

2.5–7 965

2.10 964

3.4 961, 972

4.1 965

7.5 322

Appendix 1.16 322

Origen

Against Celsus (Contra Celsum)

1–3 844

1.1 858

1.2 858, 860

1.3 858

1.5 859

1.6 852, 859

1.7 858

1.8 844, 859

1.9 859

1.13 859

1.14 858

1.16 858

1.17 846

1.19–20 846

1.20 846

1.21 847

1.22 858

1.26 852

1.27 858

1.28 101, 851, 858

1.32 101, 844

1.34 846

1.34–8 846

1.38 852

1.39 851

1.46 852

1.50 856

1.52 856

1.54 853

1.57 852, 856

1.62 852, 859

1.63 846

1.66 851

1.67 853

1.68 852, 853

1.69–70 851

1.71 852

2.1 816

2.4 852, 858

2.5 853

2.6 852

2.8 852

2.9 852

2.10 846, 853

2.11–12 853

2.13 856

2.14 852

2.15 856

2.16 853

2.19 856

2.21 856

2.22 852

2.23 853

2.24 853

2.25 853

2.26–27 852

2.27 1016

2.28 856

2.30 856

2.32 844, 846

2.33 852

2.34 853

2.37 853

2.39 852

2.41–42 852

2.43 853

2.44 853

2.45–46 852

2.47 853

2.48–49 852

2.51 852

2.52–3 852

2.54–55 853

2.55 853

2.56 853

2.56–7 853

2.58 853

2.59 853

2.60 853

— *Index of Patristic References* —

2.63	853	4.67-69	854
2.67	853	4.74	854
2.68	853	4.75	844
2.70	853	4.78-81	854
2.72	853	4.81-85	854
2.74-75	852	4.84	854
2.76	844, 852	4.86	855
2.78	852	4.87	846, 847
2.79	835	4.88	855
3.1	856	4.97	854
3.3	854	4.99	855
3.5	859	5.6-9	858
3.6	858	5.14	858
3.7	859	5.15-17	858
3.8	859	5.25	819, 859
3.14	859	5.25-26	858
3.17	858	5.33	858
3.19	858	5.34-35	858
3.21	858	5.41-45	855
3.22	854	5.50	858
3.24	854	5.52	846, 853
3.26-29	854	5.53	842
3.31	854	5.54	237, 846
3.32	854	5.58	853
3.39	859	5.59	858
3.41	852	5.61	158, 1016
3.44-55	1020	5.62	858
3.44-49	859	5.63-65	858
3.50-54	859	5.65	858
3.55	423	6-7	844
3.59	422	6.1	844, 860
3.65	859	6.2	847
3.68	847	6.6-8	860
3.79	858	6.8	860
3.80	857	6.7	847
3.81	857	6.10	859
4-5	844	6.12	846, 859
4.3	851	6.16	846, 852
4.5	851	6.17-18	858
4.11	844, 854, 859	6.19	854, 855
4.14	854	6.22	74
4.28	856	6.28	854
4.31	858	6.29	854
4.33-35	858	6.30	858
4.36	844, 858	6.33-35	858
4.38	846, 854	6.34-35	1016
4.39	854	6.38	858
4.42	846	6.40	859
4.47	844	6.41	852
4.51	846	6.42	860
4.52	854	6.43	847
4.54	844	6.49	848
4.54-56	854	6.50	846
4.65	854	6.51	854
4.67	844	6.53	237, 854, 1015

6.59 854
 6.62 855
 6.63 855
 6.64 855
 6.64–65 855
 6.65 855
 6.68–69 858
 6.70 858
 6.71 858
 6.72 853, 858
 6.73 851
 6.74 237, 847, 1015
 6.78 851
 7.3 856
 7.3–11 844
 7.4–42 856
 7.8–9 857
 7.9 857
 7.13 856
 7.14 858
 7.15–17 856
 7.18 856
 7.19 856
 7.20 856
 7.23 847
 7.25 856
 7.28 857
 7.31 860
 7.33–40 856
 7.35 852
 7.36 853, 856, 860
 7.39 859
 7.42 860
 7.43 855
 7.45 858
 7.53 845, 858, 859
 7.55 854
 7.56 852
 7.58 852
 7.61 858
 7.62 859
 7.68 859
 7.68–70 859
 8.2 859
 8.7 859
 8.9 852, 859
 8.11 859
 8.12 859
 8.13 859
 8.14 859
 8.16 847
 8.17 858
 8.24–27 859
 8.33–5 859
 8.34 859

8.36 859
 8.38 859
 8.39 853, 858
 8.39–40 858
 8.41 853, 859
 8.43 859
 8.45 856, 859
 8.48 857, 859
 8.49 855, 859
 8.56 860
 8.62 844
 8.63 855, 860
 8.65 818
 8.66 860
 8.66–67 818
 8.67 860
 8.68 860
 8.69 844, 859
 8.71 844, 860
 8.74 860
 8.74–75 860

Commentary on Matthew

10.17 239
 24.9 (Sermo 39) 836

Commentary on Romans

5.19 480

Epistles

1.14 86

Exhortation to Martyrdom

22–23 816
 33 817
 47 1122

First Principles (Peri archôn/De principiis)

1 658
 1.1.7 1122
 1.3.5 825
 1.4–8 1012
 2.3.1 251
 2.7.3 929, 947
 4 676
 4.2.9 1011

Homilies on Genesis

13 677

Homilies on Luke

1 240

Letter to Gregory

I 780

Philocalia

13.2 1017

Pachomius, Bobairic Life of

126–133 1090

126–134 1090

201 1108

Pachomius, Greek Life of

120 1090

Pachomius

Regula

119 468

Pacian of Barcelona

Epistulae

I (Ad Sympronianum) 932

Palladius

De incarnatione

70–116 1189

Dialogue

3.83–84 1146

4 1144

5 1128, 1136, 1138, 1139, 1140, 1145

6 1139

7–8 1147

7.87–9 454

8 1138, 1144

10 1132

Lausiac History

7 455, 464, 784

21–22 1090

21.8 1090, 1099

35 469

40 1247

Passio Donati

3 960

Passio Isaac et Maximiani

8 957

Passio Marculi

3 957

Passio Mariani et Iacobi

2.2 837

Passio Pauli

I 710

Passiones sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis

1.1–3 941, 1056

1.4 1056

2.1 1051, 1052, 1057

2.1–2 1049

2.1–3 1058

2.3 1048 n. 2, 1054, 1057

3.1–3 1049

3.5a 1049

3.5b–6 1049

3.8 1059, 1060

3.8–9 1049

4.1 1059, 1062, 1065 n. 36

4.1–10 1049

4.7 1060

4.10 1059

5 439

5.1a 1049

5.1b–5 1049

5.3 1060, 1065 n. 33

5.5 1060

5.6 1049, 1060

6 439

6.1 1053

6.1–6 1049

6.3–4 1053

6.3–5 1053

6.6 1053

6.7 1049

6.8 1049

7 432

7–8 442

7.3–8 1049

7.5 1059

7.9 1053

7.10–14 448

8.1–4 1050

9.1 1062, 1066 n. 43

10.1–13 1050

11.1–13.8 1050

12.3 1054

12.6 1050

14.1–21.11 1050

16.2 1064 n. 2

16.2–4 1063
16.4 836
18 442
18.4–6 1063
18.8 1053
20.1 1060
20.1–2 1057
20.8 942
21.2 826

Passio Sancti Iustini et socii

3 710

Paulinus of Milan

Poems

27 753
32 753

Vita Ambrosii

6 1179
6–9 1179
9 1180
15 1193
18 1189
23 1194
26.3 1195
29 1195
31 287
38 1181, 1184

Pelagius

To Demetrias

3.2 1218

Photius

Bibliotheca

121 925

Polycarp

Letter

3.1 519
4.1 519
4.2–3 519
5.2–3 519
6.1 519
9.1 519
13.1 519
13.2 519

Possidius

Vita Augustini

10.1.22 960

Protevangelium of James

1.2 792
4.2 792

Prædestinatus

De hæresibus

1.26 944
1.86 943, 945

Prudentius

Against Symmachus

2 50

Peristephanôn Liber

3 438
10 436

Pseudo-Basil

Commentary on Isaiah

5.158 776

Pseudo-Chrysostom

De poenitentia (PG 64.12–13) 785

Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions

1.27–71 155
1.33.3–5 156
1.33–71 155
1.35.2 156
1.36.1–1.39.3 156
1.42.1 156
1.43.1 156
1.43.1–2 156
1.43.3 156
160.4 156
1.62.3 156
1.64.2 156
168.2 156
1.70.1–8 156
1.71.3–4 156

Pseudo-Tertullian

Adversus Omnes Hæreses

7 943, 947

Rufinus

De alteratione librorum Origenis

10–13 1005, 1020

Historia Ecclesiastica

1.36 1259
2.11 1179
10.39–40 102

Severus

Historia patrum Alexandrinorum

1.8 1103

Socrates

Historia ecclesiastica

1.13.7 947
1.9.30 851
1.14 1103
1.27 269
2.4.1 270
2.34 1252, 1268
3.1 1253, 1254, 1267, 1268
3.11 1267
3.12 1268
3.14 1268
3.17 1252, 1254
3.18 1269
3.19–21 1260
3.21 1260
3.23 1258
3.23.37 849
6.6 1134
6.8 1134
6.11 1134, 1146
6.12–14 1147
6.14 1138
6.15 454
6.16 1140
6.24 321

Sozomen

Historia ecclesiastica

2.4.6 269
2.9.1–5 837
2.17 1103
2.18 947
2.32.2 947
3.1 1252, 1268
3.2–3 1268
4.23.3 270
5.1 1256, 1267, 1268
5.1–2 1268
5.2 1252, 1267, 1268
5.3 1253, 1268
5.4 1252

5.5 1253, 1268
5.7 1268
5.9 1253
5.10 1253, 1268
5.19 1254
6.1 1260
7.5–7 284
7.25 285
8.4 1134
8.8 1134
8.9 1139
8.10 1134, 1146
8.13 1147
8.14 1138, 1147
8.16 454
8.18 1140
8.20 1142
8.23 1144

Sulpicius Severus

Dialogues

1.8 1173

Chronicle

2.45 610

Synesius of Cyrene

Epistulae

4 467, 468

Tatian

Oration to the Greeks

1–4 537
5 537
5–30 537
5.1 537
7 537
9.2 537
11 537
12.1 537
13 537
15 537
15.1 537
15.4 537
18 536
20.2 537
21 537
30.1 537
31–41 537
34 423

35 537
36.2 537
40 537
42 537

Tertullian

Ad martyras

1.3 826

Ad Scapulam

3 841
3.1 1053
5 304
5.1 818

Ad uxorem

1.3.4 1040
2.4.1–2 1041
2.4.2 447
2.5 484, 886
2.8.3 1041

Adversus Marcionem

3.24.4 947
4.22.4 947
4.40 483
5.8 1065 n. 25

Adversus Praxean

1 319, 943
1.5 1034
2 658
2.4 1034–5
26 658
30.5 947

Adversus Valentinianos

4 923, 926
5 526

Apologeticum

1.1 747
2.3 876
7.1 877
8.4–5 1038
8.5 548
8.6–9 822, 836
9.15 1037
10.1 878
11.15 818
12.3–5 1036
14.7–8 818
16 877

17.4–6 1039
18.4 1028
18.8 80
21.1 80
24.2 1038
24.6 1038
24.8 1038
24.9–10 1038
31.2 1038
33.1 1038
37 241
39.2 1037
39.7 1037
39.11 1037
39.13 818
39.21 740
40 841
40.2 826, 836, 878
41.5 1038
49.6 836
50.3 826
50.13 1036
50.15 826
50.16 1038

De anima

9 431
9.4 940, 1034
55.4 1051
55.5 938, 947

De baptismo

1–20 305
4 738
16 818, 835
17 448, 811
17.5 319, 1054
18 480

De carne Christi

5.4 1032

De corona militis

3 1053

De cutlu feminarum

2.2 423
2.13.7 1045

De exhortatione castitatis

6.2 947
10.5 940

De fuga in persecutione

6.2 1040
9.4 938, 940, 1040
13 245

De idolatria

3 747
4 747
4.1 1043
6.2 1043
9.8 1043
11.2 1043
11.4 1044
12.4 1043
13.4 1044
14.3 1044
16.1 1044
16.4 1044

De ieiunio

1.1 933
1.3 1041
3.1 933
11.1 933
15 947
16.8 933

De oratione

1.6 1045

De pallio

6.2 1039

De patientia

13.6 1040

De praescriptione haereticorum

7.9 1032–3
13 254, 658
25–26 658
30 926
33.11 154
41.5 433
44.13 1033

De pudicitia

1 947
5.11 886
21 1043
21.7 938
22.1 1066 n. 43

De resurrectione carnis

11 940, 947
11.2 939, 947

43 472
63.9 947

De spectaculis

1 826
2.8 886

De testimonio animae

5.1 1039

De virginibus velandis

1.4–5 1042
1.5 947
1.7 1042
1.8 947
1.10 947
15.1 886
17 940

Scorpiace

6.11 1029

Testament of Truth

56.1–58.6 926

Theodore of Mopsuestia Homily

6.12 600

Theodoret of Cyprus

Haereticarum fabularum compendium

3.2 931

Historia ecclesiastica

3.1 1267, 1268
3.2 1268
3.3 1253, 1268
3.4 1254
3.5 1269
3.6 1255
3.6–7 1268
3.8 1269
3.14 1139
4.26 1248
5.17 1195
5.32 1134

Interpretatio in Psalmos

150 779

Theodotus

Excerpts of Theodotus

74.2 74
78.2 76, 909

Theophilus of Antioch

Ad Autolycum

1.3 542
1.5 544
1.8 544
1.10 544
1.11 544
1.13 544
1.14 855, 544
2.8 544
2.9 544
2.10 544
2.12 544, 546
2.13 544
2.14 544
2.15 545
2.18 545
2.19 545
2.27 545

2.28 545
2.32 545
3.16 545
3.23 545
3.29 545
3.30 545

Tripartite Tractate

119.16–18 926

Vita Olympiadis

6 1132
7 1132
8 1132

Vincent of Lérins

Commonitorium

18 1045

SUBJECT INDEX



- Abgar: king of Edessa 332
 abstinence: sexual 408–9
 Acacius of Caesarea: Homoian 994
 achievement: meaning 373
acropolis 694
Acts of Andrew *see* *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*
Acts of John *see* *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*
Acts of Paul 881: *see also* *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*
Acts of Peter *see* *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*
 Acts of the Apostles: as a historical source 138
Acts of Thomas *see* *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*
 Addai 337, 339
adoratio 36
 Adrianople, Battle of 279, 281
Adversus Haereses, Irenaeus 553–4
 adultery 47, 390
 advanced agrarian society 11–12; and Galilee 116–21; *see also* economy
 Aelia Capitolina *see* Jerusalem
 Aelia Eudocia 48
 Aelius Donatus, Jerome's teacher in Rome 1151
 Aetius, Neo-Arian: life and theology 995
Against Celsus, Origen 561–2, 1017
Against Marcion, Tertullian 569
agonistici *see* Donatism
agora 694
 agriculture 6–7; *see also* Galilee
 Agrippina 42, 48
 Alexander, bishop of Alexandria: action against Arius 976–7; patron of Athanasius 1103
 Alexander of Abonoteichos: founder of mysteries of Glycon 71
 Alexander Severus 826
 Alexander the Great 53, 54, 58–61
 Alexandria: beginnings of Christianity 241, 335; destruction of library 286; persecution 245; place of origin of *Letter of Barnabas* 150; turmoil on Alexander's death in 328 CE 1103; *see also* biblical interpretation
 allegory *see* biblical interpretation
 Altar of Victory 44, 280, 1189; and Valentinian II 283
 Ambrose 48, 279–80, 283; and Theodosius 285; appointment as bishop of Milan 1179–81; aristocratic family 1177–8; attack on homoian Arians 1186–7, 1193; church-building programme 1184–5, 1198–9; complexity 1175–7; creating an ecclesial community 1196–1200; devising an episcopal role 1182–95; dispute over basilica 1190–2; early life 1177–9; education 1181–2; encouraging virginity 359–60; exegesis 613; generally 1175–203; hymn composition 1191–2; originality 614; patron 1181; personal characteristics 612–13; political career 1178; qualifications for episcopacy 1181–2; reforming ecclesiastical hierarchy 1199–200; relationship with Theodosius 1189–95; relics of Gervasius and Protasius 1192–3; synagogue burning in Callinicum 1194; Thessalonica incident of 390 1194; writings 1184; *see also* Milan; Satyrus
 amphitheatre: Carthage 304
anachoresis/withdrawal *see* Anthony of the Desert ('the Great')
 anaphora 491–2
 Anaximander: map-making 8
 ancestors 59
 Anomœanism 588–9
 Anomoians *see* Arianism
 Anthony of the Desert ('the Great') 335, 349–51; *anachoresis*/withdrawal 1092–5; asceticism 1095–7; demons 1098–9; generally 1102–27; his life 1091–2; his writings 1090–1; Incarnation 1102; Inner and Outer Mountains

- 1092, 1099; legacy 1100; monk and minister 1099–100; pneumatology 1095; problems of historical interpretation 1088–9; reaction of Gibbon 1088; sacred geography 1092–5; sources 1089–91; the *Life* by Athanasius 1088–90; thoughts 1097–8
- anti-society *see* John, Gospel of; John, Letters of
- Antioch: birthplace of John Chrysostom 1128–9; Christian beginnings 240–1, 331; Council 650; incident at 140; site of imperial court under Julian 1254–5
- Antiochene School 596–7; *see also* biblical interpretation; Diodore of Tarsus; Nestorius; Theodore of Mopsuestia
- Antiochus of Ascolon: Platonist 65
- Antoninus Pius 28
- anthropology: Mediterranean 10–11
- Aphrahat 347
- apocalyptic literature: Jewish 91–2
- apocrypha: Christian 791ff.; *see also* *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*; *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*; *Protevangelium of James*
- Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* 798–811; asceticism and dualism 808–10; evangelism and edification 806–8; relation to the canonical Acts of the Apostles 799–801; relation to the Greek novel 801–3; relation to novelistic biography 803–5; reliance on Jewish exegesis 805–6; surviving examples 798; women 810–11
- Apollinaris 594
- Apollinarianism 594–6
- Apollonius of Perga 6
- apologetic 525; apologies as response to hostile environment 840–1; in *Protevangelium of James* 795–6
- Apology*, Tertullian 566–7
- Apologists: generally 525–51; *see also* Athenagoras; Justin; Melito of Sardis; Minucius Felix; Tatian; Theophilus of Antioch
- Apostles 317
- Apostles Creed *see* creeds
- Apostolic Fathers: generally 503–24; variety of the genre 503
- Apostolic Tradition*, Hippolytus 646
- Arbogast 287
- Arcadius 48, 1134
- Arch of Titus 80
- archaeology: monastic sites 344, 360
- architecture: *aula ecclesiae* 717–26; baptisteries 738–9; basilicas 693, 724–33; catacombs 736–8; *collegia* and collegial halls 696–7; Constantine's church building 726–30; *domus ecclesiae* 711–17; Dura Europos house-church 713–14; fourth and fifth centuries 724–40; from first century to early fourth century 701–24; generally 693–746; house-churches 701, 707–11; influence of synagogues 702–7; *martyria* 733–8; mithraea 699–700; public and private architectural environments 694–701; temples 695–6; *see also* Lateran basilica; St Peters; San Clemente
- Ardabau: place of origin of Montanism 935–6
- Arianism: and Ambrose 279–80; 612–15; Alexandria 1104–6; Arians and neo-Arians (Homoians, Anomoians and Heterousians) 990–7; attitude of John Chrysostom 1143; Auxentius 1178; Christ as saviour and exemplar 986–7; early Arian documents 979–90; early history 975–9; early use of scripture 987–8; frameworks for Arius' theology 980–8; generally 975–1001; homoians in Milan 1186; 1190; impact of Constantine 1080–1; influences on Arius 988–90; later history 990–3; nature of Arian teaching 609–10; 980–7; Nicaea and its aftermath 978–9, 1080–1; on succession 323; proscription by Theodosius 284; support of Eusebius of Caesarea 977–8; teaching on Logos/Son 982–6; teaching on Trinity 981–2; *see also* Acacius of Caesarea; Aetius; Arius; Asterius the Sophist; Athanasius; Eunomius; Eusebius of Caesarea
- Arius 581, 582–3, 609, 975–9; *The Myth of God Incarnate* 975
- Aristarchus 61
- aristocracy: after Constantine 269–70; persistence of paganism 278–9; under Theodosius 285–7
- Aristotle: cosmology 8; 61; *see also* Peripatetics
- Ark (of the Covenant) 96
- Arles: Council of 322
- Armenia and Georgia: early Christianity 334–5; influence of Judaism 340
- army, Roman 28–33; after Constantine 271–2, 1081–2; under Julian 276–7
- army, Herodian 120
- Arrian 53
- art: Roman imperial 35
- art: early Christian 747–72: biblical sources 769; biblical themes in catacomb frescoes 755–6; chronological periods 750–1; community formation 769; manuscript illustration 766–9; mosaics and ivory carving 762–5; origins and development 747–9; provenance and context 751–3; relation to imperial themes 760; relief sculpture on sarcophagi 756–61; sculpture in the round 761–2; wall painting 753–6; *see also* catacombs; Dura-Europos; Good Shepherd; idolatry; *orans*; Rome

- Ascents of James* 155–6
asceticism 325–8, 344; among women 352, 357;
 Anthony of the Desert 1095–7; Athanasius
 1122; Augustine 363, 1211; Cappadocian
 357–8; Egyptian 1107; in Apocryphal Acts
 808–10; Italian 359–61; Jewish 410; John
 Chrysostom 1340–1, 1144; Syrian 346–8; *see*
 also monks and monasticism; Olympias
- Asia Minor 240
Asterius the Sophist: possible influence on
 Asterius 989
Athanasian creed *see* creeds
Athanasius 281; asceticism 1122; bishop 1104,
 1111; bishop and patron 1114–18; criminal
 charge and deposition 1108–9; cult of martyrs
 1119; date of Easter 1107; exile 1112; exile to
 Trier 1108–9; international politician
 1113–14; life 583, 991, 1103–14; Nicaea
 1106; on the Incarnation 1102, 1120–3; on
 the Spirit 586; opposition from Constantius
 1112; return from exile 1110; theological
 vision 584–5, 1120–3; transitional figure
 1123–4; understanding of *homoousios* 585–6;
 see also Caesarian
- Athenagoras: biography 539; theology 539–42
Augustine : as monk 363–4; birthplace
 (Thagaste) 1206; bishop 1213; Christianity
 and paganism 1215; conversion 621, 1206–11;
 dispute with Jerome 1170–1; doctrine 1221–3;
 doctrine of the fall 1209–11; effect of
 Ambrose 1207; experience in Milan 1207;
 faith and reason 1221–2; generally 1205–26;
 impact of Athanasius' *Life of Anthony* 1088;
 Incarnation 1222; interaction with emperors
 1109–12; lay community in Thagaste 1212;
 life 619–22; Manicheansim 619, 1207; monk
 1212; original sin 1210; preaching 1213; pre-
 conversion life 1206; priest 1211; political
 views 1220; respect for the Donatist Tyconius
 967; response to Donatism 607–9, 1216–18;
 response to Pelagianism 1218–20; rhapsodic
 vision 1208; scriptural interpretation
 1213–15; the two cities 1220–1; Trinity
 1223; writings 622–5
Augustus 19–20, 30, 33, 35, 41, 47, 48, 53
aula ecclesiae *see* architecture
auloi 775–6
Ausonius 279, 280
Auxentius, bishop of Milan 1178, 1182
- Baetica 38
baptism: before Council of Nicaea 475–80;
 climax of catechumenate 306, 311; Donatist
 views 964; from Nicaea to 430 CE 487–9; link
 with creeds 645–9; mid-second-century Rome
 478; New Testament 475–7; Tertullian 1033;
 the *Didache* 477–8; third century 479–80; *see*
 also *Apostolic Tradition*; *Catechetical Lectures*
baptisteries *see* architecture
bandits 462
Bar Kochba 80, 84
Barbelognostics 908
Bardesanes 240
Barnabas, Letter of 150–1, 514–16; the two ways
 515–16
Basil of Caesarea 357–8; on Holy Spirit 589–90;
 see also Cappadocian Fathers
basilicas *see* architecture
Basilides 918–19, 1015
Basilina, Julian's mother 1251
beginnings 53
Benedict: his *Rule* 346
Bethlehem 57; Jerome 1153; monks 353
Bible: canon 100; Septuagint 100
biblical interpretation: allegorical/Alexandrian
 675–9, 1157; Antiochene 679–80, 1157;
 Augustine's scriptural interpretation
 1213–15; Augustine's programme for the
 interpreter 681–3; Celsus' attack on
 allegorical interpretation 846–7; Christian
 100–1; Christian 'Proof from Prophecy'
 664–73; Jerome's commentaries 1166–8;
 Jewish 100–1, 1156; Jewish context 660–4;
 Julian (the Apostate) 1264; Origen 1011–12;
 pesher interpretation 663–4; types 670–1; *see*
 also Diodore of Tarsus; exegesis; Marcion
- bishops 40, 317; after Constantine 270–1; and
ascetics 358, 364; exemption from civic duties
1076; factor for unity 253–4; in Rome
319–20; relationships with monks 1117; *see*
also ministry
birkat ha-minim 151–2
Bithynia 43, 46
Blandina 442, 1048
body: medical and sexual approaches 406–7
Bordeaux pilgrim 456
breakwaters 469
Brisson 1140
Britannicus 30
broker *see* patron and client relations
Broeten, Bernadette 413
bureaucrats, Roman: 40–7; 298–9; bureaucratic
 culture 41; numbers 41; social mobility 299
- Caecilian 606, 952–3; *see also* Donatism
Caesar Galerius 30
Caesarea Maritima 119
Caesarian: building in Alexandria 1115–16
Caligula 30, 35
Callinicum, destruction of synagogue 285

- cannibalism *see* popular responses
 canon: *see* scripture, Christian
 Capernaum 118
 Cappadocia 357
 Cappadocian Fathers: Christology 593–6;
 defining orthodoxy 592–3; doctrine of Holy
 Spirit 589–91; generally 587; opposition to
 Anomœanism 588–9; opposition to
 Messalianism 591–2; *ousia* and *hypostasis* 589;
 response to Apollinarianism 594–6;
 unknowability of God 588; *see also* Basil of
 Caesarea; Gregory of Nazianzus; Gregory of
 Nyssa
 Caracalla 31, 39, 48, 245, 383
 Carthage: Conference of 953, 964–5, 1216–17;
 Cyprian 321; early Christianity 241;
 martyrdom of Perpetua 301, 304, 826; site of
 Montanism 941–2; *see also* Felicitas; Perpetua;
 Tertullian
 carts and carriages, Roman 461–2
 catacombs 240; expansion in late second century
 831; wall paintings 751, 753–6; *see also*
 architecture
Catechetical Lectures, Cyril of Jerusalem 647
 catechumenate 303; before Council of Nicaea
 475–80; from Nicaea to 430 CE 487–9; in
 Carthage 305–8; in Jerusalem 308–11;
 Perpetua 1049; *see also* conversion
 Catholic church: ideal of 604–5
 Celestius 626
 celibacy 47; and Augustine 1211
 Celsus 561–2; criticism of scripture 846;
 knowledge of Bible 846; legacy 857; life
 843–4; *see also* *Against Celsus*; *True Discourse*
Chareas and Callirhoe, Chariton 801
 Chalcedon, council of 604
 charismatic phenomena: and church office
 316–19; and Montanus 9 39; and Perpetua
 302; and women 431; *see also* Montanism
 Chariton 355
 charity: enlargement after Constantine 267–8
 Christ: according to Arius 982–7; according to
 Justin Martyr 529–30; according to
 Origen 1018–19; *see also* Jesus
 Christianity: and Constantine 265–6; as a new
 ‘race’ 232–3; early history 138–52;
 geographic spread 240–2, 296–8; 330–6;
 impact on landscape 274–5; influence of
 Judaism 339–41; issues of definition 136–7;
 its attractions 267–8; number of Christians
 295–6, 381, 842; periods of 231; popular
 antagonism to 870–4; relationship to Rome
 242–9, 261–3; 822–3; relationship to Rome
 according to Celsus 859–60; separation from
 Judaism 232–5, 504; theological diversity
 336–43; unity and diversity 253;
 unpopularity with contemporaries 815; use of
 Jewish scripture 233; *see also* *Christianos*;
 philosophical opposition
 Christianization: as a term 266–7; of the Roman
 empire 266–25
Christianos 137, 176–7, 369
 Christmas: date of 487, 495
 Christology: Antiochene 596–9; Cappadocian
 593–6; Ebionites and Nazarenes 158–9; proof
 from scripture 667–70
 Chrysippus: Stoic 64
 church building: in Jerusalem 309; Church of
 Holy Sepulchre 490; St Peter’s, the Vatican
 491
 churches: before Constantine 1077;
 Constantine’s church-building 1078;
 movement from private to public space with
 Constantine 489
 Cicero, Marcus Tullius 19
 Cicero, Quintus 19–29
 circumcellions *see* Donatism
 circumcision 141, 179–81
 cities: autonomy 45; competition between 46;
 nature of 375; quarters 394–5
 citizenship: Roman 32, 38–9
 Claudius 30, 32, 35, 42
 Cleanthes: Stoic 64
 Clement of Alexandria: life 558; theology 559;
 works 558–9
 Clement: leader of Roman church 505
Clement, First 505–8
Clement, Second 511–14; date and place of
 composition 512; sections 512
 Clement of Rome 299
 Clement of Alexandria: gnostic terminology 251
 clergy: exemption from curial office 268;
 revocation of privileges by Julian 1253
 coinage: Galilee 124–6; under Constantine 1081
 collegia 59, 696; *see also* architecture
comitatenses 31
 commitment activation: meaning 371
 Commodus 28, 30, 42, 245
Commonitory, Vincent of Lérins 654–5
 communication *see* travel
 conflict: and popular responses to Christianity
 869; social-scientific perspective 869
consilium 41
 Constantine 30, 31, 32, 36, 40, 44, 47, 48, 50,
 248, 260, 264–5, 266, 278, 295, 308, 335,
 385, 603, 650, 834, 1156; administrative
 reforms 1081–2; as politician 1071–3;
 Constantinople 1078–9; church-building
 programme 726–30; continuing interest in
 pagan gods 1075; dyarchy and tetrarchy

- 1069–70; early career 1070–1; generally 1069–87; handling of Christian dissent 1079–81; his conversion 1074; his dynasty 1082–3; imperial patron 1077–8; legislation 1076–7; management of the empire 1081–3; Nicaea 1081; origins 1069; relationship with the Church 1075–81; response to Arianism 1080; response to Donatism 1079–80; wars generally 1082; war with Maxentius 1073–4
- Constantinian dynasty 269
- Constantinople 32; foundation 41, 265; Council of 284, 592; Fifth Council of 1007; reformation of imperial court by Julian 1253; Second Council of 324
- Constantius 258, 260, 1069
- Constantius II 35, 603, 1251
- Contra Galileos* see Julian (the Apostate)
- context: 3, 21–2 and see Mediterranean; socio-political 58
- conversion: meaning 300; records of Christian conversions 300–1; in Carthage 305–8; in Jerusalem 308–11; role of women 434–7
- Coptic: Egyptian language 335
- Corinth 14
- Cornelius 176
- corona civica* 32
- corruption: by governors 43
- cosmology: ancient Greek cosmologies 8–9, 56–8; Ptolemaic 56–7; see Hipparchus
- Council of Jerusalem 820
- councils: and ecclesiastical succession 319–25; role of Constantine at Nicaea 650; see also ecumenical synods
- Crates: Cynic 63–4; map-making 8–9
- creation: Julian (the Apostate) 1263–4; Theophilus of Antioch 544–5
- creeds: Apostles creed 639–43; Athanasian creed 638–9; central to Christianity 636; factor for unity 254; link with baptism 645–9; nature of 637–42; New Testament foundations 641–2
- crime and punishment 47
- crowd: in Mark 208
- culture: ancient Mediterranean 9–21, 374; ‘Christian’ 55; cultural affiliations in Galilee 126–87; cultural difference 9–10; effect on morality 387–9; Hellenistic 55; superiority of Greek culture according to Celsus 860; see also family and kinship; gender; group-orientation; honour (and shame); limited good; and patron–client relations
- cunctos populos* decree 283–5
- Cynics 63–4; and Jesus 129, 131; see also Crates; Diogenes
- Cyprian: actions in persecution 246–7, 606; attitudes to lapsed Christians 829; death 830; life 572–3; on succession 321; ‘Pope’ of Carthage 321; theology 574; works 573
- Cyril of Alexandria 599–600
- Cyril of Jerusalem 309–10, 355
- daily life 393–8; activities 393; activities and social rank 393; see also houses
- Damasus, pope 1153, 1161
- Damascus: and Paul 178, 182–3, 185
- Danube 28, 30
- Day of Atonement 97
- De civitate Dei*, Augustine 623
- De doctrina Christiana*, Augustine 623, 681–3
- De musica*, Augustine 780–1
- De Trinitate*: of Augustine 623; of Hilary of Poitiers 611
- Decius 246, 827–8
- decurions 12, 46, 369, 379
- Demeter: see mysteries
- Democritus 63
- Desert Fathers see monks and monasticism
- deviance: in a group-oriented culture 388
- diakonoi* 513
- Diatessaron*, of Tatian 237, 338
- Didache* 147; 513–14
- Dinocrates 442
- Diocletian 31, 34, 36, 40, 47, 247–9, 258, 260, 606, 831–3, 952, 1069–70
- Diodore (of Tarsus) 596, 679–80
- Diogenes 63–4
- Dionysius 321
- Divine Institutes*, Lactantius 575
- divorce 47
- doctrine: according to Julian (the Apostate) 1264–5; relation to dogma 636–7; manner of development 653–7; nature of 636–7; see also *Commonitory*; theology
- dogma see doctrine
- domestic religion 15, 375–7
- Domitian 30, 42
- domus ecclesiae* see architecture
- Donatism 259, 321, 952–74; African theology 962–72; alternative views of church 962–3; archaeological remains 607; attitude of Augustine 1216–18; baptism 964; circumcellions/*agonistici* 959–62; cultural issues 955–6; Donatist theology 963–7; economic grievance 958–63; history of the movement 952–3; impact of Constantine 1079–80; origins 606–8; political disaffection 956–8; relevant conditions in North Africa 953–62; social context 953–62; teachings 608–9; theological diversity 967–72; town and country 954–5; see also Augustine; Caecilian; Carthage; Cyprian Donatus;

- Majorinus; Parmenian; Petilian; Tyconius
Donatus 606, 952, 1216; *see also* Donatism
dualism: Gnostic 74
Dura-Europos 241; art 751–13; house-church
713–15
Dyarchy 260, 1069–70; *see also* Tetrarchy
- Easter: date of 322, 485–7, 494, 1107; *see also*
quartodeciman debate
Ebionites 154–5, 235
economics: 374; *see also* social institutions
economy: ancient Mediterranean 13–15;
debasement of North African coinage 829;
linked to kinship, politics and religion 13–14;
Galilee 121–6; *see also* advanced agrarian society;
elite and non-elite; peasants; slaves
ecumenical synods 652–3; Chalcedon 604;
Constantinople 592–3; growing authority
581; Nicaea 581–2, 604, 978–9, 1106
'ecumenicity' 580
Edessa: early Christianity 240–1, 331–2;
opposition to Chalcedon 332
Edict of Milan 264, 295, 335, 834, 1074; effect
on theology 603–6
Egeria 313, 353, 488–9
Egypt: early Christianity 335–6; Isis cult 69; *see also*
Coptic
Eighteen Benedictions 99, 101, 131; *see birkat*
ba-minim; *see also* Jews
Elagabalus 245
Elchasites 235
elite and non-elite 11–12, 200–3; expendables in
Mark 206–7; in Galilee 116–17; peasants in
Mark 207–8; retainers in Galilee 120;
retainers in Mark 204–5; urban elite in Mark
203–4; urban non-elite in Mark 205–6; *see also*
economy; social stratification
Eleusis: mystery cult 67–9; *see also* mysteries
emperors, Roman 33–40, 379–80; Christian re-
interpretation 272–3
Ephesiaca, Xenophon 801
Ephrem the Syrian 342, 347–8; biblical symbols
1241–3; birthplace (Nisibis) 1228; character
1229–30; critique of Judaism 1229; divine
image in human beings 1247–8; generally
1228–50; God's presence to each human
being 1236–9; hymns 1230–1; importance
1230–1; Incarnation 1233–6; life 1228–9;
Nicene orthodoxy 1229; presence of God in
the world 1232–3; sacred dimension of all
history 1243–7; Syriac author 1229; *theosis*
1239–41;
Epicurus 62
Epicureans 62–3; chance 63; pleasure 63; *see also*
Democritus
episcopoi 513, 517
episcopal jurisdiction 40
equites 44–5
Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine,
Newman 655–6
Eratosthenes of Perga: map-making 8, 10, 61
eschatology: according to Celsus 857–8
Ethiopia: early Christianity 336; influence of
Judaism 340–1
ethnos 374
Eucharist: before Nicaea 480–4; climax of
catchment 307; connection with hymnody
781–4; from Nicaea to 430 CE 489–93; New
Testament period 480; sacrificial aspect 483;
second-century Rome 480–2
Euclid 61
Eudorus of Alexandria: Platonist 65
Eudocia 49
Eudoxia 48, 1128, 1134, 1138
Eugenius 287
Eulalia 438
Eunomius, Neo-Arian: life and theology 995–7
Eusebius of Caesarea: support for Arius 977;
theology 977–8
Eustatius the Sophist 276
Eustatius, bishop 357–8
Eustochius 1153, 1155
Euthymius 355
Eutropius 1140
Evagrius Ponticus 351
exegesis: Alexandrian 675–9; Ambrose of Milan
613; Antiochene 597; 679–80; Jerome
617–18; rabbinic 661–3
exorcism 306, 310
Ezana 336
- familia* 42
familia Caesaris 299
family and kinship: 15–16, 59; attitude of
Christian women to family 434–41;
connection with economics and religion 375;
fictive kinship 59, 70–1, 73; fictive kin and
the Jesus group 381, 391–2; in Roman empire
378–80; women's role in transformation of
446; *see also ordines*
fasting 147, 310
fate: Stoic 64
Fausta 48
Feast of Tabernacles 96–7
Felicitas 303, 440, 442, 1060–1
Festus 39
Felix 39
fictive kin *see* family and kinship
Flavia Domitilla 505
Flavius Clemens 505

- Foucault, Michel: understanding of ethics 403–4; views on women 404; writings on sexuality 403–6
- Fourth Ezra*: importance for Montanus 935
- frescoes *see* art: early Christian
- Frigidus, Battle of 287
- Galen 407
- Galerius 248, 258, 260, 263–4, 398, 831, 1070–3
- Galilee: agriculture 122; archaeology 115; context for Jesus 113; ethnic mix 126–8; natural resources 121–2; policing 120; social stratification 116–21
- Gallican Psalter 1163
- Gallienus 247
- Gallus, Julian's half-brother 1251–2
- gender: in Mediterranean culture 391–2; relationship to language 1055–6; relationship to sex, power and ideology 402–3; *see also* Foucault, Michel
- genealogies 213
- gennêtai*: in mysteries of Demeter 67–8
- genos* 374
- gentiles: first mission to 170–1, 177–8; growing importance 232; numbers in Jesus group 381
- Giambattista Vico 53
- Glycon *see* mysteries
- gnosis *see* Gnosticism
- gnostic traditions 74–6; *see also* dualism; Seth
- Gnosticism: beliefs and practices 915–25; central myth 920–1; definition 909–15; nature of 249–51, 902–3, 907–28; Origen 1014; origins 916–19; problems of early meanings of 907–9; relationship to Judaism 916; *see also* Basilides; *Gospel of Thomas*; Nag Hammadi; Saturninus; Seth; Sethians; Simon; Simonians; Valentinus; Valentinians
- God: according to Celsus 854–5; according to Julian (the Apostate) 1262–3; Athenagoras 439–40; Ephrem 1232–3; Justin Martyr 528–9; Tatian 537–8; Nicene doctrine 581–6; pre-Nicene views 582; Theophilus of Antioch 452–4
- Godfearers: and proselytes 92–4
- Good Shepherd 748–9, 750
- Gospel of Thomas* 909
- governors, Roman 43
- Gratian 279–80; 1186–9
- Great Persecution *see* persecution
- Great Tradition 15, 203, 205, 209
- Greek novels 801
- Gregory of Nazianzus: and Second Council of Constantinople 324, 357; on Holy Spirit 590–1; *see also* Cappadocian Fathers
- Gregory of Nyssa 357; *see also* Cappadocian Fathers
- Gregory the Illuminator 334
- Gregory the Wonder-worker 297
- group-orientation 16, 374; and deviance 388; and moral actions 389–91; and moral agency 387–9; in relation to popular dislike of Christians 882
- Hadrian 28–9, 37, 38, 50, 80, 83, 242
- Hadrian's Wall 28
- haireseis* 660
- haggada* *see* rabbinic exegesis
- halacha* *see* rabbinic exegesis
- health: of expendables 206; of urban non-elite 205–6; *see* elite; non-elite
- Hebrews, letter to 150–1
- Hebrews and Hellenists 138–9, 171, 174
- Hecataeus: map-making 8
- Helena 48, 49, 274, 309, 454, 1069, 1078; *see also* pilgrimage
- Hellenists 171–8
- Helvidius 360, 1155, 1170
- heresy *see* internal renewal and dissent
- Hermas 509; *see also* *Shepherd of Hermas*
- Hermes 76
- Hermetic traditions 76–7
- Herod Antipas 113, 117–18, 120, 126, 129
- Herod the Great 119–20, 129
- Herodotus: maps 8
- Heterousians *see* Arianism
- Hexapla*, Origen 560–1, 616, 1009–10
- Hilary of Poitiers: life 610; theology 611–12; works 611
- Hillel *see* rabbinic exegesis
- Hipparchus: equinoctial precession 56, 61
- Hippolytus: life: 555; works 555–7; theology 557–8
- history: writing 60
- History of Dogma*, Adolf Harnack 656–7
- Holy Land: pilgrimage after Constantine 274; *see also* pilgrimage
- Holy Spirit: Athanasius 586; Cappadocian Fathers 589–91; Montanist views 945; North Africa 825; Origen 1019
- Homoians *see* Arianism
- homousios*: and Origen 563–4; Arian controversy 609–10; Athanasius 1113; attitude of Eusebius 978; Hilary of Poitiers 611; Nicaea 583
- honestiores* and *humiliores* 39
- Honoratus 362
- Honorius 626, 953, 1216
- honour (and shame): central Mediterranean value 16–18, 34; 45–6, 374; 211–12; Jesus'

- ascribed honour in Matthew 213–14; Jesus' acquired honour in Luke 216–18; morality and God's honour 389; status of occupations 383–4; *see also honestiores* and *humilores*; Jesus Hosius of Cordova 323
- house-church: architecture 701, 707–11; at Dura-Europos 241; *see also* architecture
- houses: of elite 394; of non-elite 394
- hymns: debt to Judaism 783; early Christian 781–4; in New Testament 781–2; not early connection with Eucharist 782–4
- hypostases*: and Origen 563–4; Athanasius 1113; Cappadocian Fathers 589
- Iamblichus, Neoplatonist 1252, 1255
- identity: Jewish 189–90
- idolatry: Christian criticism of 747–8, 871–2
- Ignatius of Antioch: bishop 517; Jewish-Christian relations 168–9, 193; letters 516–19; martyr 244
- imaginative literature; generally 791–812; *see also* apocrypha: Christian, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*; *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*; *Protevangelium of James*
- imperial cult 35–6, 872, 879
- imperial image 35
- imperium* 33, 35, 58
- Incarnation: importance for Athanasius 1102, 1120–3; for Augustine 1222; for Ephrem 1233–6
- incest 47; *see also* popular responses
- inducement: meaning 371
- Infancy Gospel of Thomas* 797
- influence: meaning 371
- inns 463–4
- internal renewal and dissent: early Christian trajectories 896–8; generally 893–906; execution of Priscillian for heresy 282; meaning of 'heresy' 894–6; insiders and outsiders 894–6; Montanism as a renewal movement 903–4; Paul as the first dissident 899–901; prohibition by Theodosius 284; Tertullian 1033; the orthodoxy/heresy debate 893–4; *see also* Arianism; Gnosticism; Donatism; Montanism
- intolerance: Christian 282; *see also cunctos populos* decree; Priscillian
- Irenaeus of Lyons: 318; life 553; works 553–4; theology 554–5
- Irni, law of 38–9
- Isis *see* mysteries
- Isocrates: origins of mysteries of Demeter 67–8
- Itureans 127
- Jacobites 155–7
- James (brother of Jesus) 136, 137; death of 141–2; letter of 143–4; *see Ascents of James*
- Jamnia 85–86, 151; *see also* rabbis
- Jerome: and asceticism 1153–6; biblical commentaries 1166–8; biblical interpretation 1156–70; competence in Hebrew 616, 1158–9; controversialist 1170–2; encouraging virginity 360; generally 1151–73; his erudition 616; in Bethlehem 354; invective 618; life 615–16, 1151–3; legacy 1172–3; literal and allegorical exegesis 1168–9; on succession 324; Origen 1171; rhetorical training 1153; textual criticism 1159–61; translation of Bible (the Vulgate) 616, 1161–5; use of Jewish interpretations 1169–70; *see also* Aelius Donatus; Augustine; Bethlehem; Damasus; Helvidius; John of Jerusalem; Jovinian; Rufinus
- Jerusalem 48; Aelia Capitolina 84; as pilgrimage centre 49, 309; destruction 80; Jesus 130; monks 353; population and languages in fourth century 309
- Jesus: according to Celsus 851–4; according to Julian (the Apostate) 1261–2; Cynics 129, 131; death as martyr 819; explanations of his Galilean ministry 128; Galilean context 113; genealogy 213; honour rating 212; in his Galilean world 128–31; John's story of 218–22; Luke's story of 210–12, 215–18; Mark's story of 209–10; Matthew's story of 210–14; Melito of Sardis 546–7; parables 121; purity 209; rural ministry 114; 'third wave' of research 113
- Jesus messianists 381–2
- Jesus resurrectionists 382
- Jesus son of Ananias 130
- Jewish Christianity: definition 137–8; early forms 138–9; literary productions 143–7; second century and beyond 152–9; separation from Christianity 193; *see also* Ebionites; Jacobites; Justin Martyr; messiah; Nazarenes
- Jewish literature: apocalyptic 91–2; Greek dimensions 89–91; Mekhilta 88; midrashim 86, 795; Mishnah 87; rabbinic 87; Talmud 90; targumim 86; Tosefta 87
- Jews: attitude to Christianity 101–2; Babylon 82; Constantine's legislation 1077; contact with Christians 101–2; diaspora 81–2; distribution of communities 80–3; identity 83; issues of definition 137; Jewish literature 86–92; John Chrysostom 1141–2; number in Roman empire 80–1; patriarchate and its end 83, 103; prayer 98–9; revolts against Rome 80, 83–4, 117, 142–3; 200–1; Syria 82;

- symbols 82, 96, 153; under Roman rule 83–85; *see also* Judaism; Judeans; messiah
- Joanna, wife of Chuza 425
- John, Gospel of 218–22; anti-society 219
- John, letters of 223; anti-society 223
- John Cassian 353, 361, 362–3
- John Chrysostom 48; biography 1128–30; born in Antioch on the Orontes 1128; generally 1128–50; hermit outside Antioch 1128; his social interactions 1131–48; patriarch of Constantinople 1128–30; sources on social interactions 1131; ways of approaching 1130–1; work with women deacons 1132–3; *see also* Olympias
- John Chrysostom, relationships with:
administrative officials 1140–1; ascetics 1139–40; clergy 1133; 1137–9; ethnic groups 1145–6; heterodox and schismatic Christians 1143; Jews 1141–3; laity 1135–6; pagans 1142; royal court in Constantinople 1134–5; various status groups 1144–5; visitors 1146–7; women 1147–8
- John of Jerusalem, dispute with Jerome 1171
- Jonah sarcophagus 757
- Joseph: in the *Protevangelium of James* 792–5
- Jovinian 1155
- Judaea: revolt of 66 CE 27
- Judaea desert 355
- Judaism: Christian criticism of 234–5, 236–7, 504, 516, 518; Christian identification with 235; relationship to Christianity 232–4, 339, 504
- Jude, letter of 144–5
- Judeans: in Galilee 127; in John's Gospel 219–20; preferable translation for 'Jews' 137; 205; 220, 232
- Julia Domna 48
- Julian (the Apostate) 30, 32, 275–8; and Jews 102; and Roman army 271–2; belief in superiority of Greek *paideia* 1265–7; birthplace (Constantinople) 1251; Edict on Rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem 1256–9; Edict on Religious Toleration of 361 CE 1252; generally 1251–72; interest in prophecy 1255–9; life 1251–60; Neo-Platonism 1252, 1255; *see also* Maximus of Ephesus
- Julian (the Apostate) attitudes to: Jesus 1261–2; God 1262–3; creation 1263–4; scripture 1264; church doctrines and practices 1264–5
- Justin Martyr: and Jews 101; biography 527; Jewish Christians 152–4; themes of his *Contra Galileos* 1260–7; theology 528–36; works 527–8
- Justina 48, 283
- kinship *see* family and kinship; social institutions
- labarum*: Constantine's symbol 1074
- Lactantius 40–1, 272–3, 602; life 575; works 575–6
- lapsi* *see* Novatian; Novatus
- Lateran basilica 727–8
- law: accusatorial dimension 869; in letter of James 144; in Matthew 145; in the *Didache* 147; Paul 186; Roman imperial 36–40
- Lenski, Gerhard and Lenski, Jean 11; refinement in relation to Galilee 116–21
- Lérins 362; *see also* Honoratus
- letter-writing 469–72; imperial post 471–2; reasons for 469–70; time for delivery 471; *see also* literacy
- Libanius 1128, 1251–2
- Licinius 49, 264, 834, 1074–5
- Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Philostratus 804; use by Sossianus Hierocles 848
- lighthouses 469
- liminality 312
- limitanei* 31
- limited good 18
- literacy 470
- Little Tradition 15
- liturgical rites: Eastern and Western 477
- liturgical year: before Council of Nicaea 485–7; from Nicaea to 430 CE 494–5; in Athanasian Alexandria 1116
- liturgy *see* worship
- Logos: according to Justin Martyr 532–4
- Lucian of Samosata 72
- Lydia, dealer in purple cloth 426–7
- Lyons: site of persecution of 277 CE 241, 244, 824, 875–6
- Macarian Homilies* 348, 357
- Maccabees: as martyrs 816–17
- Macrianus 829
- Macrina 357–8
- Magi 57
- magic *see* popular responses
- Magnentius 32
- Magnus Maximus 32, 282
- Majorinus 606
- Manicheanism: and Augustine 619–20
- manuscript illumination *see* art: early Christian
- map-making, ancient Mediterranean 8–11; *see also* Anaximander; Crates; Hecataeus; Herodotus; Marcus Agrippa; Parmenides; Pythagoras
- Marcella 359
- Marcellinus, Pope 259
- Marcellus, Pope 259

- Marcion 154, 236–7; 674–5, 1014–15; women in Marcionite movement 433
- Marcus Agrippa: map-making 9
- Marcus Aurelius 28, 38, 244; Stoic 64–5
- mariology: in *Protevangelium of James* 796
- Marius Priscus 43
- Mark, Gospel of 200–10
- marriage: in early Christianity 414; in Judaism 410; in New Testament 411–13; partners of different status 435; *see also* sexuality
- Martin, Dale 413
- Martin of Tours 298, 361–2
- martyrdom 265, 815–39; and women 438–40; Greco-Roman models 817–18; Jewish models 816–17; Perpetua 1061–2; voluntary martyrdom 818–19; *see also* oppression; Perpetua
- martyries *see* architecture
- Mary, mother of Jesus: in the *Protevangelium of James* 792–5, 796
- Mary Magdalene 435
- Mass, the 491
- Matthew, Gospel of 145–7
- Maxentius 264, 834, 1071, 1073–7
- Maximilla 903, 929, 934, 941; *see also* Montanism
- Maximin 245, 826–7
- Maximian 258, 260, 831–3, 1070
- Maximus 281, 1189
- Maximus of Ephesus 1252
- Mediterranean: region 3; ancient views on its regionality 7; climate 6–7; nature of 374; strategies of persuasion 198–9; topography 6; *see also* culture; map-making
- Mekhilta *see* Jewish literature
- Melania the Elder 441, 445
- Melania the Younger 49, 360–1; marriage 441
- Meletius, schism of 259
- Meletius the Confessor: John Chrysostom's patron 1128, 1137
- Melitian schism 953, 1104
- Melito of Sardis 546–7
- menorah 96
- Messalianism 591–2
- Messalina 42
- messiah: Jewish belief 136; messianic expectation 83; messianic movement 232; significance in Jewish Christianity 143–8
- midrashim *see* Jewish literature
- Milan: new imperial capital 279; turmoil on death of Auxentius 1179
- military force 26–7
- Miltiades, Pope 259, 321
- mithraea *see* architecture
- Milvian Bridge, Battle of 264, 271, 834, 1073–4
- ministry: *episcopoi*, *diakonoi* and *presbyteroi* 317–18; succession 318; *see also* bishops
- Minucius Felix 547–9
- Mirian 334–5
- Mishnah: *see* Jewish literature
- mission: role of women 443–7
- Mithraea 72–4: San Clemente 505
- Mithras: *see* Mithraea; mysteries
- Monarchianism: nature of 252
- monks and monasticism: Anthony 326; approaches to 344–6; attitude to bishops 1107; characteristics of 326; Egyptian origins 348–53, 1107; in Gaul 361–3; in Italy 359–61; in Palestine 353–7; rivalry with bishops 327; Syrian origins 346–8; *see also* asceticism; stylites
- Montanism: charismatic phenomena 929–31; date of origin 933–5; geographic expansion 936; nature of 251–2, 319, 903–4, 929–51; New Prophecy 929–30; origin 929; North Africa 941–3; Perpetua 1061; Phrygian elements 932; place of origin 935–6; role of women 434; 932; Rome 943–5; scholarly attitudes to 945–7; Tertullian 930; 1028–30; *see also* Ardabau; *Fourth Ezra*; Maximilla; Montanus; Priscilla
- Montanus 903, 929, 937, 938–9; 952–3; sayings 938
- morality: Athenagoras 540–1; early Christian 386–93; interacting moral agents 391–2; Justin Martyr 534–6; moral actions 389–91; moral agents 387–9; new morality after Constantine 392–3
- mosaics *see* art: early Christian; *see also* Ravenna
- Muratorian canon 239, 320
- music: early Christian 773–90; early hymnody and psalmody 781–8; liberal art of music (*musica*) 779–81; musical instruments in Christian imagery 777–9; Patristic polemic against pagan music 774–7; Psalms as source of imagery 778–9; *see also* *auloi*; *De musica*; hymns: early Christian; music of the spheres; 'Oxyrhynchus Hymn'; psalmody
- music of the spheres 779–80
- musica* *see* music: early Christian
- mysteries: Christian 'mysteries' 307–8; Demeter at Eleusis 67–9; Glycon 71–2; Hellenistic 67–74; Isis 69–71; Mithras 72–4; *see also* Alexander of Abonoteichos; *gennētai*
- Nag Hammadi 241, 909
- Nazarenes 157–9
- Nazareth 118
- Neo-Platonism: and Augustine 620; and Julian 1252, 1255

Nero: and the Great Fire of Rome 874
 Nerva 28
 Nestorius 596, 598–9
 network theory 456–7
 New Prophecy *see* Montanism
 Newman, John Henry 655–6
 Nicaea, Council of 284, 323, 650–1, 978–9,
 1106; *see also* ecumenical synods
 Nicene creed 279–80, 651–2
 Nile 349
 Novatian: life 574; on *lapsi* 247; popular support
 320–1; works 574–5
 Novatus: on *lapsi* 247
 Nubia: early Christianity 336
 number of Christians *see* Christianity

 Odes of Solomon 341–2
 office (ecclesiastical): Weber's three types 316; *see*
also bishops; charismatic phenomena;
 priesthood
oikoumene 370, 374
 olives 6–7
 Olympias: friend of John Chrysostom 1132,
 1148
On God's Workmanship, Novatian 575
On the Lapsed, Cyprian 573
On the Soldier's Crown, Tertullian 567
On the Soul, Tertullian 567–8
On the Trinity, Novatian 574–5
On the Unity of the Church, Cyprian 573
 oppression, political 819–35; by Julian 1254;
 Lyons martyrdoms 824; mid-second century
 824; Trajan 822; *see also* persecution
orans 748
ordines: organisation of Roman kin groups 379
 Origen: biblical interpretation 676–9; castrated?
 1008; commentaries 1010–11; debate about
 his orthodoxy 1007–8; generally 1005–26;
 homilies 1010; life 559–60, 1008–9;
 influence on Jerome 1157; posthumous
 defenders 1006–7; relation to Judaism 1018;
 scriptural hermeneutic 1011–12; theology
 563–5, 1012–21; writings 560–3, 1009–12;
see also Basilides; Celsus; *Hexapla*; Marcion;
 Valentinus original sin 417; *see also* Augustine
 Orosius, Paulus 626
 orthodoxy: Cappadocian 592–3; 'Western' 605;
see also internal renewal and dissent
 orthodoxy and heresy 552, 593
 Ostia 14
 Otho 30
 outgroup *see* social ranking
 'Oxyrhynchus Hymn' 773–4

 Pachomius 335, 349, 351–2

Paedagogus, Clement of Alexandria 558
 paganism: action against 37, 53; in countryside
 277, 297; in Roman aristocracy 278–9; its
 persistence 275–8; pagan intellectuals 275–6
 (*see also* Eustathius; Sopater; Themistius); re-
 assertion by Julian 275–8, 1253–4
 paideia *see* Julian (the Apostate)
 Pallas 42
palatium 41–2
 parables: *see* Jesus
 Parmenian the Donatist 964–5
 Parmenides: maps 8
 Parthia 28, 31
Passion of Perpetua 1030; date 1051–3; gendered
 language 1055–6; generally 1049–58;
 historicity 1053–8; *hypomnemata* 1055;
 influence of Joel 2:28–9 1056–7; Latin as
 original language 1051; synopsis 1950–1
pater familias 378
 patriarchy: *see* Jews
 patron and client relations 18–21, 48, 379;
 Athanasius as bishop and patron 1114–18;
 Ambrose 1181; broker in John's Gospel
 221–2; in relation to synagogues 703–4; John
 Chrysostom 1144–5
 Paul: affliction 184; as persecutor 178–82; as the
 first dissident 899–901; attitudes to women
 187, 190–1; conversion 182–5; cultural
 influence on teaching 171; his works as
 scripture 236; Jewish law 186; missionary
 activity 185–90; producing divisions 820;
 Pharisee 184; relations with Jerusalem church
 139; Roman citizenship 39
 Paula 351, 359, 1153, 1154
 Paulinus: Italian monasticism 360
 peasants 12–13; and taxation in Galilee 122–4,
 207–8; *see also* economy: elite and non-elite
 Pelagius 324, 635
 Pelagianism 625–9; and Augustine 1218–20; *see*
also Celestius
 Pella; flight to 141–2
 Pentecost 175
 Pepouza 930
 Peripatetics 62
 Perpetua: attitude to family 439–40, 442; diary
 301–4; life 1058–60; martyrdom 826;
 Montanism 1061; relationship with father
 1060; visions 1049–50; *see also* Dinocrates;
 Felicitas; *Passion of Perpetua*
 persecution: Great Persecution 247–9, 258, 606;
 831–3, 848, 850, 952; history of 242–9;
 Lyons in 177 CE 241, 244, 824, 875–6; Rome
 in 64 CE 820–1; under Valerian in 253–60 CE
 829–30; *see also* philosophical opposition;
 popular responses

- persuasion: strategies 198–9
 Persian empire: early Christianity 332–4
pesher see biblical interpretation
 Peter 136, 176; first and second letters 148–9
 Peter, bishop of Alexandria 259
 Petilian the Donatist 965–6
 Philip, the early evangelist 172
 Philo of Alexandria: allegorical interpretation 675–6; exegete 1156
 philosophical opposition (to Christianity) 840–68: hostile environment 840–1; overview 841–2; see also Celsus; popular responses; Porphyry of Tyre; Sossianus Herocles; *True Discourse*
 philosophy: Graeco-Roman 61–6; see Cynics; Epicureans; Peripatetics; Platonism; Stoics; see also philosophical opposition
philotimia 17–18
 pilgrimage 49, 454–6; routes 453–4; to the Holy Land 274, 454; see also Bordeaux pilgrim; Constantine; Helena
 Plato 7; Platonic Academy 62
 Platonism: Hellenistic 65–6; see Antiochus of Ascolon; Eudorus of Alexandria; Plotinus
plerôma see gnosticism
 Pliny the Younger 37, 43, 46, 242, 821–2
 Pliny the Elder 57
 Plotina 48
 Plotinus: Platonism 65; relation to gnosticism 76
 political religion 15, 375–7; see also politics
 politics see social institutions
 Polycarp: martyrdom 244, 519–21; letter of 519
 Pomponia Graecina 427–8
 Pontius Pilate 113
 Pontus 297
 popes: in Rome and Carthage 321
 popular responses (to Christianity) 869–89; charges of cannibalism, ass-worship, magic etc 877–9; charges of incest 880, 884; charges of practising magic 883–4; Christians as anti-social 870–4; economic motivations 879; in the later New Testament 870–4; see also persecution; philosophical opposition; stereotypification
 Porphyry of Tyre: 831; influenced Diocletian to launch Great Persecution 850; life 849–50; polymath 850–1; writings 850–1
 power: connection with power 375; meaning 371
 Postumus 31
 prayer: before Nicaea 484–5; cathedral 493; from Nicaea to 430 CE 493–4; monastic 493–4
 prefaces: in ancient literature 215; Luke's Gospel 215–16
 presbyters: Perpetua 1062
 Priscilla (and Aquila) 427
 Priscilla (the Montanist) 903, 929, 939–49; see also Montanism
 Priscillian 282, 604
progymnasmata see rhetoric
 proselytes: and Godfearers 92–4
Protevangelium of James 792–7; apologetic and polemic 795–6; its narrative 792–5; mariology 796
Protrepticus, Clement of Alexandria 558
 psalmody: cathedral service 785; fourth-century connection with Eucharist 787–8; monastic influence 784–7
 Ptolemy 56
 Pulcheria 48
 pulpit 718
 purity: in Mark's Gospel 209
 Pythagoras: map-making 8; founder of Pythagoreanism 62
 quartodeciman debate 252–3, 487, 932
Quedlingburg Itala 766–7
Quicumque vult see Athanasian creed
 rabbis: and Jamnia 85–6
 rabbinic exegesis see exegesis
Rabbula Codex 767
 Ravenna 750; mosaics 762–5
Refutation of All Heresies, Hippolytus 555–6
 regional diversity 330–6; see Alexandria; Antioch; Armenia and Georgia; Egypt; Ethiopia; Persian empire; Syria
 religion: domestic 375–7; Eastern religions in Rome 697–701; embedded in kinship and politics 375; Hellenistic religions 66–77; link to politics and kinship 15, 60; political 375–7; 'right religion' 37; see also mysteries; social institutions
 resurrection: Athenagoras 541–2
 retainers: see elite and non-elite
 Revocatus 303, 305
 rhetoric: generally 198, 213; in Matthew 213; Jerome 1152; *progymnasmata* 213–14, 220
 Rhine 28, 30
 roads, Roman 458–60
 role of the state 46
 Rome: bishops 319–20; Christian art 751; Christian beginnings 240; Christianization 267–75; Jewish hopes for its downfall 152; persecution of Christianity 242–9, 1063; place of origin of 1 Peter 149; see also persecution
Rossano Gospels 767
 Rufinus, dispute with Jerome 1171

- San Clemente 73, 505–7, 710, 720–1
San Crisogono 719–20
sarcophagi *see* art: early Christian; *see also* Jonah
sarcophagus; *traditio legis*
Saturninus 918
Saturus: martyr with Perpetua 1050
Satyrus, Ambrose's brother 1185
Scapula 245
Scilli: site of persecution 244
Scillitan martyrs 1048
scribes 203–4; *see also* elite and non-elite
scripture, Christian: and baptism 645–6;
Athanasius' 39th *Festal Letter* 1118;
development of canon 236–40, 1118, 1165–6;
Ethiopian canon 337; importance in life of
faithful 643–4; Jewish: Christian use of 233,
643–5; Justin Martyr 531–2; Marcion's
attitude to 237; Origen's three senses 564;
Syrian canon 337–8; *see also* Marcion;
Muratorian canon
sculpture *see* art: early Christian
sect: early Christianity 160
Senate 42–4
senators 42–4
Seneca the Younger: Stoic 64
Sephphoris 113, 118, 120, 129
Septimius Severus 28, 44, 48, 245, 303
Septuagint 66
Seth 74–5, 921
Sethians 913
Severian of Gabala 1134, 1138
Severus Alexander 245
sexuality: abstinence 414–15; and ideology 402;
early Christian discourses on 414–18; in the
Graeco-Roman world 406–9; issues of method
and theory 402–6; Jewish perspectives 410;
links to physiological issues 406–7; marriage
414–15; New Testament perspectives 410–14;
overview in relation to early Christianity
401–2; virginity 415–18; *see also* abstinence;
body; gender
Shapur I 30, 333
Shapur II 333
Shenoute of Atripe 342
Shepherd of Hermas 508–11: date of composition
509; sections 508; theology 510–11; *see also*
Hermas
ships: cargo-carrying 465–6; dangers 467–8;
experience in 468–9; sailing methods 466–7;
time for sailing 469
Simon 917
Simonianism 917
slaves 13; *also see* economy
social location: generally 198–9; Mark's Gospel
200–8; *see also* social status; social stratification
social mobility 298–9; *see also* Clement of Rome
social ranking: and daily activities 393–4;
definition 369–70; extrinsic (institutional)
criteria 370–3; in Roman empire (after
Constantine) 375–6; in Roman empire (before
Constantine) 380–5; intrinsic (personal)
criteria 373–4; of Jesus group members
369–76, 380–6; *see also* achievement;
commitment activation; inducement;
influence; power; social roles; social status;
social stratification
social roles: meaning 371
social status: meaning 371; of early Christians
298–9; of occupations 383–4; *see also* elite and
non-elite; social stratification
social stratification 11–13, 200–8, 370; *see also*
elite and non-elite
social system 198
social institutions 370
sociolinguistics 198
soldiers: conditions 32–3
Sopater 275
Sossianus Hierocles: encouraged Great
Persecution 848; life 848; writings 848–9
soul: Tertullian 1034
speech accommodation theory 198–9
SS Giovanni e Paolo 722–3
St Peter's 728–9
Stephen 172, 176, 178
stereotypification: and physiognomic literature
883; in a group-oriented culture 882–3; in
relation to popular antipathy to Christians
Stoics 63–5; *see* Cleanthes; Chrysippus; Marcus
Aurelius; Seneca the Younger; Zeno Tarsus
39
Stridon, birthplace of Jerome 1151
Stromata, Clement of Alexandria 558
stylites 326; *see also* Symeon
Symeon the Stylite 348
Symmachus 279, 280, 283, 286, 1189
synagogues: architecture 94–5; art 95–7;
influence of Christian architecture 702–7;
liturgy 97–9; origins 94
Syncretica 353
Syria: beginnings of Christianity 331
Syriac 346, 1145–6, 1229
table-fellowship: Jewish and gentile 175, 193
Talmud *see* Jewish literature
Tatian 338; biography 536–7; theology 537–8
taxation: advanced agrarian economy 11–12;
Diocletian's regime 34; Galilee 121–4; in
cities 46
tax-immunity: soldiers 32; civic 45
Temple (Jerusalem): destruction 80; Jewish

- loyalty to 124; Julian's plan to rebuild 102–3;
1256–9; Stephen's criticism 176
- temple religion 129–30
- temples *see* architecture
- Tertullian 304, 319; anti-heretical writings
1033–5; apologetic writings 1035–9; eulogy
of celibacy 1040–1; generally 1027–47; life
565–6, 1027–8; idolatry 1043–5; modesty
1042; Montanism 565–6; 1028–30; moral
and disciplinary writings 1040–5; pioneer of
Christian Latin 1030–1; religious freedom
1037–8; rhetorical ability 1031–3; veiling
1042; writings 566–70; theology 571; *see also*
Passion of Perpetua
- theotokos*: a coinage by Origen 564
- Thessalonika: massacre of citizenry 285; *see also*
Ambrose
- Tetrarchy 40, 258, 1069–70; *see also* Constantius;
Diocletian; Galerius; Maximian
- Thaddaeus 240
- The Myth of God Incarnate* 975
- The Prescription against Heretics*, Tertullian 568
- Thecla 434, 436
- Themistius 276, 285
- Theodore of Mopsuestia 333, 596, 597–8, 680
- Theodosian Code 36
- Theodosius I 32, 279, 280–2, 308; and Ambrose
285, 1189–95; and paganism 285–7, 603;
Theodosius II 36, 48
- theology, Christian: beginnings 552–3; nature of
637
- theological diversity 336–43
- Theophilus of Antioch 542–6
- Theophrastus 61
- theoria* 679–80
- Thomas, the apostle 797
- Thoth: *see* Hermes
- Tiberias 113, 123, 129
- Tiberius 30, 35
- titular churches 710, 720, 730; *see also*
architecture; St Clemente
- titulus Clementis* *see* San Clemente
- Titus 27
- tolls 464–5
- trade: Galilee 124–6
- traditio legis* 758–9
- Trajan 28, 37, 48, 80, 242, 822
- trajectories *see* internal renewal and dissent
- travel: Christian reasons for travel 453–6;
experience by land 458–65; experience by sea
465–9; general reasons for travel 453;
missionary 453–4; slowness of 452; *see also*
bandits; carts and carriages; inns; pilgrimage;
roads; ships; tolls
- Trdat III: first Christian monarch 330, 334
- Trier 279
- Trinity: Augustine's *De Trinitate* 623, 1223;
Tertullian 1034–5; Trinity in Arianism 981–2
- True Discourse*, of Celsus: Christians and the
Roman empire 859; eschatology 857–8;
general characteristics 844–7; God 854–5;
Jesus 851–4; Jesus's followers 858–9; prophecy
855–7; superiority of Greek culture 860;
themes 851–60
- Tyconius, Donatist exegete 967–72; *Book of Rules*
967–9; doctrine of the church 967–72
- types *see* biblical interpretation
- Tyre: Galilean trade 124–5
- Tyrian coinage 124
- Ulphilas 297–8
- Valens 279
- Valentinian I 278–9; tolerance 279, 1178, 1186
- Valentinian II 48; and Altar of Victory 283; 287
- Valentinian: gnostic 75
- Valentinians 908–9, 921–5; similarities to
Origen 1016
- Valentinus: gnostic 76, 921–5, 1015–16
- Valerian 30, 246, 829
- Vespasian 27, 30
- Vibius 301, 305; *see also* Perpetua
- Vienna Genesis* 767
- Vienne: site of persecution 244
- virgins 359, 391: and monasticism 327; *see also*
sexuality
- Vitellius 30
- Vulgate *see* Jerome
- wealth: connection with power 375; connection
with social ranking 377; redistribution under
Constantine 267–8
- widows: 391; in early Jerusalem community 175
- women: asceticism 1154; charismatic activities
431–2; household mission 429, 435;
illegitimate activities 432–4; imperial 48–9;
importance in early Christianity 422–4; in the
Acts of the Apostles 426–7; in the Apocryphal
Acts 810–11; in the 'Jesus movement' 424–6;
legitimate activities 428–32; marriage with
men of lower status 435; Perpetua's education
1058–9; role in Montanism 932, 937–8; role
in Marcionite movement 434; role in mission
443–7; Samaritan woman 424; supporting
Jerome 354; women deacons and John
Chrysostom 1132–3; *see also* Felicitas; Lydia;
Melania the Elder; Melania the Younger;
Olympias; Perpetua; Pomponia Graecina;
Priscilla (and Aquila)
- world and worldview 55–6

— *Subject Index* —

worship: before Council of Nicaea 475–85; from
Nicaea to 430 CE 487–95; in Athanasian
Alexandria 1116; see also baptism;
catechumenate; eucharist; prayer; liturgical
year

‘Year of the Four Emperors’ 30

York: Constantine proclaimed emperor 31, 260,
1071

zealots 131

Zeno 63–4

Zosimus 287

Zosimus, Pope 324–5, 626